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Reader's Digest

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Good
NEIGHBORS
ACTS OF KINDNESS CLOSE TO HOME

**How Your
Cells Can
Heal You**

By PATRICIA PEARSON

51
**SPRING
CLEANING
Shortcuts**

From RD.COM

**A Baseball Player's
Second Chance**

From ESPN

Escape from Kabul

A DRAMA IN REAL LIFE



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Reader's Digest

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Features

46

COVER STORY

GOOD NEIGHBORS*

A delectable collection of stories about community and kindness.

48 **The Sunshine Mayor**

BY CATHY FREE FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

50 **Out on a Limb**

BY DANA HEDGPETH FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

52 **Nothing but Net**

BY DAVID WALDSTEIN FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

54 **Up from the Well**

BY ROBERT KIENER

57 **Friends, Indeed**

BY READER'S DIGEST READERS

62

LIFE WELL LIVED

The Hole in the Fence

A child's unlikely friendship with an

unseen neighbor transforms in isolation.

BY ADRIAN VAN YOUNG FROM GUERNICA

68

INSPIRATION

A Major Leaguer's Second Chance at Life*

A suicide attempt nearly ended Drew Robinson's story. Now he is adding the most remarkable chapters yet.

BY JEFF PASSAN FROM ESPN

78

HEALTH

How Our Own Cells Can Heal Us*

Breakthrough treatments in what's called regenerative medicine can be a lifesaver.

BY PATRICIA PEARSON

86

DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

Don't Leave Without Me!*

Staying in Kabul meant death for this journalist. A naval officer and a reporter were ready to help her flee—if she could make the plane.

BY FATEMA HOSSEINI WITH KIM HJELMGAARD AND KELLEY BENHAM FRENCH FROM USA TODAY

96

HOW TO

Clean the Things You Never Do, But Should*

Add an item or two to your routine, and your home will thank you.

BY EMILY GOODMAN AND JAMIE NOVAK

96

Departments

4 **Dear Reader**

6 **Letters**

WORLD OF GOOD

9 **The Fur Flies**

EVERYDAY HEROES

10 **Ghost Boat**

BY DEREK BURNETT

13 **Life Cycles**

BY ANDY SIMMONS

EVERYDAY MIRACLES

14 **Breaking Ground**

BY RYAN HOCKENSMITH
FROM ESPN

28



Humor

Life in These United States 18
 Humor in Uniform 24
 All in a Day's Work 32
 Laughter, the Best Medicine 42

BEST PET PALS

16 **Porkchop aka Ernestine**

WE FOUND A FIX

21 **Put Your Plastic Cups to Work, and More**

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

26 **Beyond Sauerkraut**

13 THINGS

28 **What Your Pet Is Trying to Tell You***

BY EMILY GOODMAN

WHERE, OH WHERE?

44 **Rolling Green Hills**

THE RD LIST

105 **The Offer, Brad Meltzer, Benjamin Franklin, and More**

QUOTABLE QUOTES

109 **Tim McGraw, Kevin Garnett, Amanda Gorman**

TRUSTED FRIEND

116 **Neighbors by Tomi Um**

The Healthy

35 **Skin Care for Warmer Weather**

BY JENN SINRICH

39 **E-Bike Safety Tips**

BY BETH WEINHOUSE

40 **News from the World of Medicine**

Brain Games

111 **Spymaster, Fact or Fiction? and More**

113 **Word Power***

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DEAR READER

Helping Hands



I HAVE MOVED MORE than any rational person should during a lifetime. But wherever I've lived, I've always found the same thing—good people.

Despite what we hear about the mood across the country, I've found that people still look out for each other in neighborhoods everywhere. You can count on someone to help shovel snow, carry groceries, or haul a stroller up the stairs. Every community I've lived in has the block party organizer, the volunteer coach, someone who sets up a Little Free Library, and that one person who gives out full-size candy bars on Halloween. (How do my kids always find you?)

We're here to celebrate those people. In "Good Neighbors" (page 46) we look at special people bringing communities together through thoughtful acts, friendly words, and, in one case, a lifesaving rescue. We also share your stories about someone stepping in with a helping hand and turning from a neighbor to a



Help us find the nicest place in America.

lifelong friend. For a wonderful story on this, be sure to read "The Hole in the Fence" (page 62), about a child's friendship with an unseen neighbor.

Now I want to hear more about your neighborhood. Every town has a place that lifts people up. Maybe it's a local diner or bookstore that creates common ground for people of different backgrounds. Maybe it's a community center that helps folks during tough times, such as a pandemic, a natural disaster, or just a streak of bad luck. We have launched our search for the Nicest Places in America 2022 and want to hear about a place you've found that makes life better for the people around you.

Let's share our stories and remind each other that you can find kindness close to home. Often right next door. **R**

Jason Buhrmester,
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LETTERS

NOTES ON
Past Issues



Little Magazine, Big Stories

“I’ve Come to Clean Your Shoes” from your collection of top stories from the *Reader’s Digest* archives (*February*) reminded me of my brother-in-law’s passing. We were flooded with teary-eyed visitors bearing casseroles and desserts—and soon there wasn’t a paper towel, tissue, or paper plate left in the house. Since then, when I visit the bereaved, I bring paper products. They’re always appreciated.

—RITA LARKIN KAYSER
Marquand, Missouri

“Reader’s Digest Saved My Life!”

Add my mom to your list of readers who’ve found medical help in *RD*’s pages (*February*). She once answered “What seems to be the problem?” with her symptoms, likely diagnosis, and treatment. The doctor laughed and asked how she was so sure. She said, “I read about it in

Reader’s Digest!” And she was correct.

—DENISE THIERY
Alexandria, Kentucky

What Roots Means to Me

Henry Louis Gates Jr. writing about *Roots* author Alex Haley (*February*) reminded me of watching the TV miniseries with my family. We discussed

it so often that it made a deep impression on our four-year-old daughter’s understanding of the word “roots.” While tugging on some stubborn weeds, she exclaimed, “Boy, these sure have a lot of ancestors!”

—JANET KEY
Annandale, Minnesota

13 Things

I found your story on cryptocurrency (*February*) interesting since it’s such a hot topic; however, the author states that Samsung is a Japanese company when it’s actually South Korean. As a Samsung employee of over 20 years, I feel obligated to clarify.

—JANA-LYNN KAM
Sunnyvale, California

Growing Hope

Jane Goodall’s story “Growing Hope” (*March/April*) about the promising resilience of nature certainly did its job. Sometimes hope comes from nature surviving at the physical edge of

extinction. Bristlecone pines survive at the highest mountain elevations of the American West. They are short, scraggly, and gnarled, and appear barely alive. Yet, there is one in California's Inyo National Forest that's nearly 5,000 years old. You can't help walking through a grove of bristlecone pines without having hope for nature.

—THOMAS STRAKA
Pendleton, South Carolina

How To Know How Much to Tip?

You are right to champion good tipping (*March/April*). During the pandemic, our favorite server brought out a pizza we were

picking up. Aware that she probably wasn't getting many tips, we tipped \$40. Choking up, she explained it was all she needed to pay her electric bill.

—CYNTHIA HAZARD
Panama City, Florida

Warning: This Fruit May Orbisculate

After reading the story about the made-up word "orbisculate" (*December/January*), residents of our senior community chose it for our word-in-a-word game. In one hour we found 223 words with four or more letters within "orbisculate." Any challengers want to take us on?

—SUE MOLLINEAUX
Torrington, Connecticut

AIRING OUT OUR DIRTY LAUNDRY

◆ "New Rules of Laundry" (*December/January*) says to wash clothes in warm water. In the desert, "cold" water is warmer than "warm" half of the year. Newcomers often ask if something is broken. In cool weather, I'll use "warm." Otherwise, I stick with "cold"!

—Joan Balaris
PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA

◆ The Laundry Guy must have a desk job if his weekly wash can be done in a day on express. On our farm, the washer runs every day, on the extra dirt cycle—if you want the cow dirt out, that is!

—Colette Zeigler-Staley
REYNOLDS, INDIANA

CALL FOR ENTRIES!

What's Your Favorite Word?

Logophiles, make some noise! Is there a word (whether in the dictionary or not) that you think is supercalifragilistic-expialidocious? A bon mot so mellifluous that you can't help but sprinkle it in like conversational parsley? A quirky regionalism or neologism that so perfectly describes something that you must enlighten the rest of the world? A definition that leaves you bumfuzzled? See terms and submit your word at rd.com/favoriteword and it might appear in *Reader's Digest*.





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World of
GOOD
 REASONS TO SMILE

The Fur Flies

HOCKEY ISN'T USUALLY associated with the warm fuzzies. But on January 22, after the American Hockey League's Hershey Bears scored their first goal of the night, fans celebrated by throwing stuffed animals onto the ice. Not tens, not hundreds, but 52,341 toys. The Bears have hosted an annual Teddy Bear Toss since 2001, donating the toys to local children's charities. It took crews more than 30 minutes to clear the ice, a result of what a Bears announcer called "sweet, cuddly mayhem." **R**

EVERYDAY HEROES

Ghost Boat

There was no one aboard the pleasure craft that almost T-boned them. So father and son went fishing for answers.

BY *Derek Burnett*

IT WAS 11:30 a.m., and the fishing so far had been a bust. Still, floating on the water 40 miles off the North Carolina coast was a great way to spend a lazy July day. Calm seas, clear skies, hint of a breeze. Not another boat in sight. Until now. Andrew Sherman, a 50-year-old investment adviser from Roanoke, Virginia, spotted a speck on the horizon. As the speck approached, it started to look like a boat. “Jack,” he yelled to his son, a 21-year-old U.S. Naval Academy midshipman, “some yahoo’s headed straight at us!”

Unbelievable. Miles of open ocean, and this idiot was on course to T-bone them. Andrew steered their boat up a couple of lengths just as the interloper whizzed by their stern. The Shermans

stared incredulously. Four fishing lines out, music blaring—your average recreational fishing craft, except there wasn’t a soul in sight. The idiot must have gone below, leaving his boat cruising along at 10 mph.

“Follow it, Jack,” Andrew said.

As Jack hit the gas, Andrew gave several blasts on an air horn. “Hey! Hey!” the Shermans shouted. Nothing. A horrifying new thought took shape: The captain had gone below, all right—and suffered a heart attack.

Father and son switched places, and Andrew maneuvered their boat alongside the other while Jack leaped onto the other boat’s deck. He turned the ignition, bringing the boat to a stop. Then he ventured down into the

COURTESY ANDREW SHERMAN



Jack (left) and Andrew Sherman caught more than fish that day.

cabin. He came back up a moment later. "Empty," he said.

Stunned, father and son said in unison, "It's a ghost boat!"

Andrew called the Coast Guard. "Man overboard," he told them, then supplied the coordinates. The two men could have left it at that, but they were curious: What happened to the captain? Locating the boat's GPS system, they searched its history log. The missing captain had marked points along his route indicating good fishing spots. Then the points abruptly stopped a few miles back.

THE GHOST BOAT'S OWNER WAS ALIVE IN THE WATER AND GROWING WEARY.



With Andrew piloting the ghost boat and Jack driving their own craft, they headed for that last point. From there, the two boats made ever-enlarging circles for the next hour. "I ran north a bit, then south. And then I ran back up north again, and then south again," says Andrew. They were searching for what he feared would be a body. What they didn't know was that the ghost boat's owner was alive in the water, and growing weary.

Two hours earlier, Sascha Scheller, a construction contractor, had been fishing for mahi-mahi when nature called. He leaned over the starboard

side to relieve himself, zipped up, turned back toward the helm, and slipped. Suddenly he was in the water.

He grasped at the boat, but the smooth hull went gliding along his palms. He grabbed wildly for the swim ladder, but it slipped between his fingers. In dumbstruck horror he watched his boat zoom off, taking his life jacket with it. His only hope was to paddle three miles back to where he'd last seen other boats.

When Scheller eventually spotted a vessel in the distance, it appeared to be maneuvering oddly—coming straight at him, then turning suddenly and heading back out. It made no sense. Nevertheless, this was his best chance at being saved. He began to kick wildly, making the biggest splashes possible. "The next thing you know," he says, "the boat doesn't turn away. It aims right at me."

Only when it sidled up to him did it dawn on Scheller: "That's my boat!"

"You have no idea how happy I am to see you," Andrew Sherman said, hauling him aboard. Other than leg cramps, Scheller was fine—and grateful the Shermans had taken the time to search for him. Other boaters had heard the call to the Coast Guard on their radios, he says, but only "the Shermans stayed on the scene."

That evening, when he got home, Andrew's wife asked him how his day had gone. "It was a slow day catching fish," he told her. "But we did catch a man." **R**

Life Cycles

BY *Andy Simmons*

ABOUT 15 YEARS ago, Andrew McLindon, an entrepreneur and avid cyclist, was riding his bike in Austin, Texas, when he thought about a friend's 12-year-old son. The boy had never known the joy of biking because he suffered from hydrocephalus, a buildup of fluid in the brain that often causes balance disturbances.

When he got home, McLindon, now 60, went online and found a three-wheel recumbent bike with a seat belt, perfect for a child with balance issues. Soon the boy was pedaling around the street with his peers, having fun and getting exercise. But there was more, as McLindon gleaned from his friend's reaction. "To see his son interacting with other kids," McLindon says. "I'll never forget the smile on his face."

That smile launched the McLindon Family Foundation. Funded by donations, the group works with pediatric rehab clinics to find children who can benefit from owning an adaptive bike—and to help craft each bike to the particular needs of the child. A bike may include a headrest, a shoulder harness, a seat belt, and a caregiver's steering and braking mechanism in the back. The bikes are expensive—\$3,000 to \$4,000, and that's with the foundation's steep manufacturer's



McLindon and a lucky bike recipient

discount. For kids lucky enough to get one, they're a life changer.

"We worked with a 14-year-old who has spina bifida," says McLindon. "She spent most days on the couch watching TV. Soon after she got her bike, she was training for special-needs triathlons. In a magazine interview, she said, 'I always knew there was an athlete in me.'"

So far, the foundation has given away 450 bikes, and that's just a start. "I do a lot of things. I run a lot of companies," McLindon says. "But getting these kids their bikes is the most important thing that I do." **R**

EVERYDAY MIRACLES



Breaking Ground

BY *Ryan Hockensmith*

FROM **ESPN**

THE STEPS AT the back of David Olson's house in Norton Shores, Michigan, were crumbling and had to go. So one day last July, Olson decided to start the demo job himself.

Olson yanked the first cinder block up with his hands. He took a step back, surprised to see that the ground underneath was sand, not dirt. Even more surprising, there were three bowling balls in the hole he'd made. "No way," Olson said out loud.

He'd recently joined two Facebook groups about people making strange discoveries, and now he had made one of his own. He posted some pictures to Facebook, then continued his work. All afternoon, Olson shoveled out sand and bowling balls.

"I had to get to the bottom," he says. "I couldn't stop." As Olson reached the last step, his whole body ached. He counted the balls and was stunned to get 158. Where did they come from?

Muskegon, Michigan, only a few miles from where Olson lives in Norton Shores, is home to the headquarters of Brunswick Bowling Products. The balls Olson dug up are Brunswicks, so those dots were easy to connect. But that didn't explain how so many of them got into the ground behind his house.

A local woman named Judy Hepler had a theory. Her husband, Mike Hepler, had worked at the Muskegon plant for 48 years, testing bowling balls to make sure they were perfectly round and dense. Those that weren't landed in the dumpster behind the factory.

Mike, who died in 2009, told Judy that sometimes homeowners would take discarded balls to use as filler for their backyards. Sand and bowling balls wouldn't pass any town code these days, but the combination is structurally sound, relatively speaking. Most highways are built using the same basic principle, with pavement over a rock foundation.

Mike had cared deeply about his job, but he'd also grumbled about it. Judy remembers when their grandson was young, Mike would tell the little guy stories of needling his bosses.

So Judy wasn't shocked that someone had found 158 bowling balls (plus four others found later) behind a house. No, what left her in disbelief was who found them. Because her grandson, the one who had listened to all those stories about goofing on Brunswick management?

That boy was David Olson.

And that wasn't the end of it. Weeks after posting his find on Facebook, Olson heard from someone at a local restaurant who asked to use the balls in what was billed as a Flintstones bowling tournament, where participants would palm and chuck balls at pins set up in the street. In exchange, Olson and his wife could play for free.

The Olsons have three young kids. It can be hard to find time for just the two of them. So they got a babysitter and went on a rare dinner date.

THESE BOWLING BALLS WERE MORE THAN JUST A BIZARRE BACKYARD DISCOVERY.



Neither of them had bowled in years, but they eked out a win in their first matchup. Then they won again. And again. As David and Megan Olson kept winning, they started to believe that these bowling balls were more than just a bizarre backyard discovery. David thought they must have an advantage since he had found the balls. Still, as they left that night with their championship trophy, they were a little weirded out.

"That makes it feel like fate," David says. "I feel the universe is telling me that our family should be bowling." **R**

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BEST PET PALS

Porkchop aka Ernestine

HERRIN, ILLINOIS

ONE DAY I noticed an animal near the woods by my house. It wasn't a skunk, an opossum, or a fox—in fact, it seemed to have no fur at all.

Weeks later, I got a clear view of the critter: a big pink pig. I couldn't imagine how a pig had strayed into our suburb, but she decided to move in. I left a bucket of water out, which she drank politely at first but then dumped to make a mud puddle. Soon she was seen wandering the neighborhood with her new bestie, a black Lab named Harley.

Neighbors set up a pig-spotting page on Facebook, where we posted photos and videos of Porkchop, as we named her. Eventually, the sightings began causing traffic jams. We learned Porkchop was a repeat escape artist from a local farm. By now, the farmer thought her more trouble than she was worth.

A nearby hobby farm was happy to give Porkchop a new home and even a new name: Ernestine. Two years later, Ernestine is thriving with ample friends, food, and mud to wallow in. And as the town's most famous resident, she even gets a float in Herrin's spring parade. **R**

—*Nominated by* JOANNE CLAYTON

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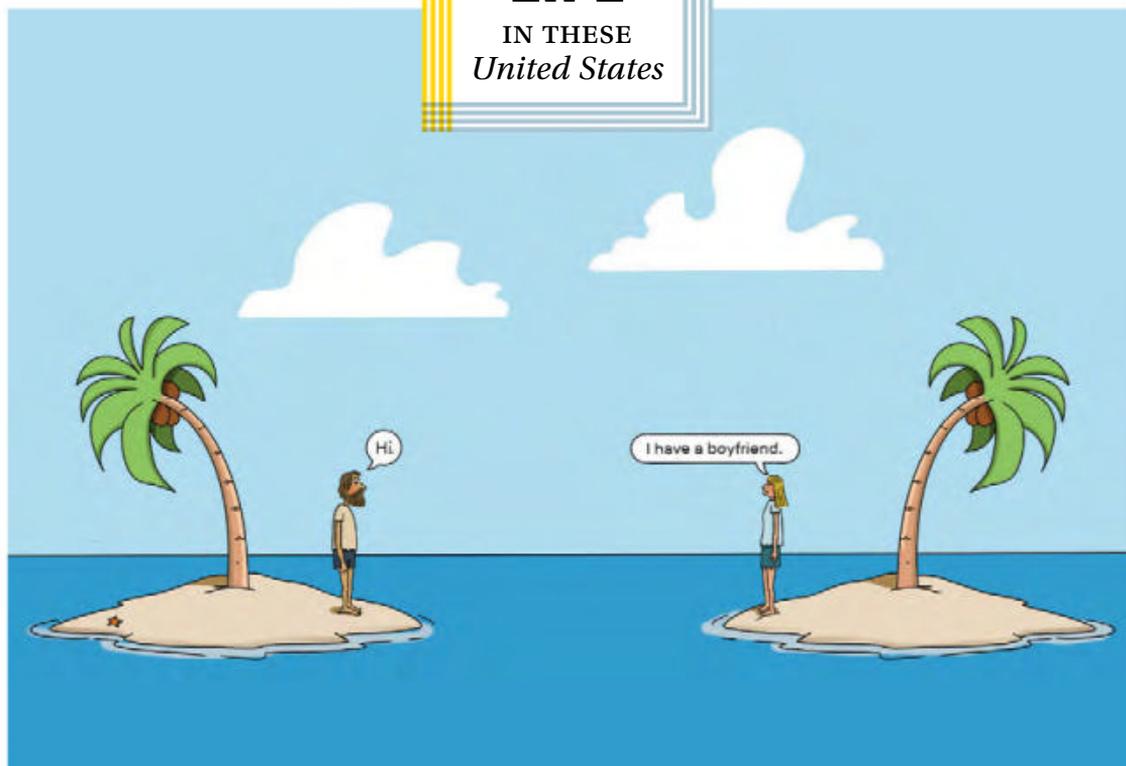


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My wife was dismayed when my sister told us that our two-year-old nephew was constantly asking to see me and never mentioning her. She could not figure out why a toddler would prefer his Uncle Chris (me) to his Aunt Crissy (her). I basked in my status as the favorite until the next time we

saw him, when, with arms wide open, he ran right past me and to my wife, shouting, “Uncle Chris! Uncle Chris!”

—CHRIS YODICE
Levittown, New York

I can't do small talk. I just asked the lady cutting my hair what she does for a living.

—[@MOMJEANSPLEASE](#)

Ah, married life. While shopping for vacation clothes, my husband and I passed a display of bathing suits. It had been at least ten years and 20 pounds since I had even considered buying a bathing suit, so I sought my husband's advice.

“What do you think?” I asked him. “Should I get a bikini

or an all-in-one?”

“Better get a bikini,” he replied. “You’d never get it all in one.”

—SOURCE: GCFL.NET

Would be a lot easier if my therapist could just shadow me for a day.

—[@DANIELLEWEISBER](#)

During and after filming the Netflix movie *Don’t Look Up*, actor Jonah Hill took to calling his costar, three-time Academy Award-winner Meryl Streep, “The Goat.” The 72-year-old Streep took it all in stride. “I thought, well, that’s cute, I am kind of an old goat,” she said during a press conference. It was left up to another, younger costar, Jennifer Lawrence, to explain to Streep that Hill wasn’t being mean. “The G.O.A.T.,” Lawrence told Streep, “stands for Greatest of All Time.”

SOURCE: THE TONIGHT SHOW

Lot of people texting audio messages these days, and I fear it’s a slippery slope to going back to phone calls.

—[@TOMATHAKKAR](#)

MAMA MIA!

Let’s wish all moms a happy Mother’s Day. After all, look what they put up with:

◆ No one is as glued to any piece of reading material as a parent counting down the songs in the program for a school concert.

—[@copymama](#)

◆ My six-year-old: I figured out the password to the tablet and bypassed the parental controls to download all my shows. Also my six-year-old: Help! I put both my legs in the same pant hole and now I’m stuck!

—[@not_thenanny](#)

◆ My ten-year-old: Grandma, can you teach Mom how to make this dessert? My mom: Oh, she already knows how



to make it, Sweetie. My ten-year-old: No, she doesn’t.

—[@Wordesse](#)

◆ In case you were wondering, the loudest sound in the world is my kid screaming “Are you pooping?!?” in a public restroom.

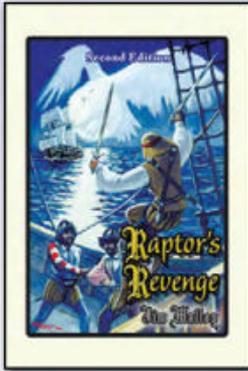
—[@UnfilteredMama](#)

◆ “You’re ugly!” “No, you’re ugly!” My identical twins, fighting.

—[@MamaNeedsACoke](#)

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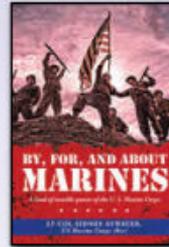
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From Dusk to Dawn

The Vicissitudes of Life

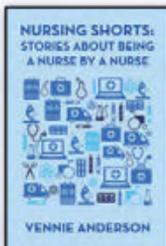
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From Dusk to Dawn shares a collection of poems that vividly paints a picture of how people overcome illnesses, war and emotional duress.



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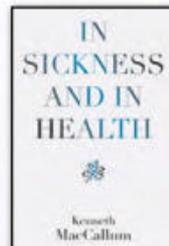
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In Sickness and In Health

Kenneth MacCallum

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Following the Seven Stages of Grief, this guide takes you through all the steps of your journey as a care giver to help you make the necessary decisions that come your way.

We Found a

FIX

HELPS, HACKS,
& HOW TO

1 ENTERTAINING Put Your Plastic Cups to Work

If you find yourself playing bartender at a cookout or tailgate party, use the lines on those red plastic cups to help keep the good times flowing. The bottom line indicates one ounce—that's a modest shot of liquor (for a celebratory round or cocktail measurement). The second line from the bottom is five ounces (hello, a crisp serving of wine or summer sangria). The third is 12 ounces (one cheer for one beer, please). And for the teetotalers, one ounce of grenadine, five ounces of Sprite, and some ice mix to make a refreshing Shirley Temple.



12 oz. Beer

5 oz. Wine

1 oz. Liquor

2 **GROOMING** **A Hair Dryer That Won't Blow It**

Why ruin the peace after a morning shower with the racket of a blow-dryer just because a towel-dry won't do the job in time? Fold that time in half by wrapping your mane not in a cotton towel but in a microfiber one; it will wick away moisture 40 percent faster.

3 **TECH/TRAVEL** **Flight Tracker**

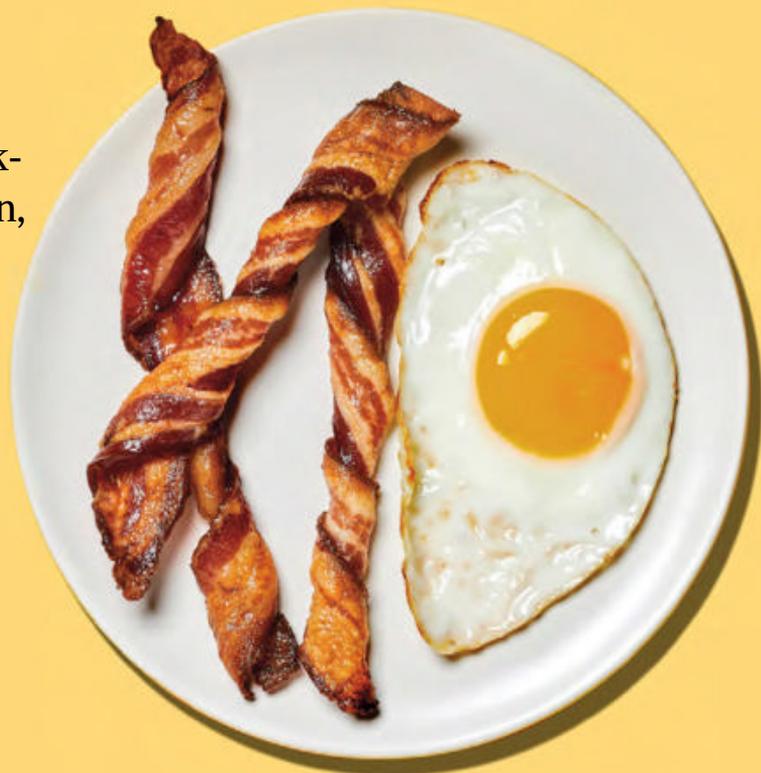
For all you iPhone-owning jet-setters, message your airport pickup the airline and flight number (e.g., Trusted Airlines 1922). Then your ride can tap on the iMessage text to automatically open a flight tracker displaying takeoff and arrival times, terminal and gate assignments, and even flight status to anticipate any delays instead of waiting in the dark of the cell phone lot.

4 **HOME** **Permanent Tiki Torch Holders**

Wrestling tiki torches into the ground only to pick them up after every stiff breeze? Here's a sturdy solution: Grab PVC piping from the hardware store and cut it into five-inch lengths with a handsaw. Drive pipes into the grass until the openings are ground level, clearing away any dirt inside. You can slide torches in and out with ease, and they'll withstand the wind.

5 **COOKING** **A New Twist on an Old Favorite**

Before placing bacon on a baking sheet to cook it in the oven, hold each strip vertically and twist it. Turning the strips into twists guarantees ultra-crispy bacon every time: No more gnawing through the floppy sections to get to the treasured crunchiness. Plus, it's a space saver that'll allow you to fit more on the pan.





6 CLEANING Shine a Light on Broken Glass

The next time you break a glass—not that we’re betting against you, we’re just betting on gravity—get all the big pieces out of the way and then cut the lights. Shining a flashlight at floor level will make even the tiniest shards glisten. Then you can gather them with a wet paper towel instead of the bottom of your foot.

7 MONEY Pay Off Your Mortgage Faster

Certified personal finance counselor Andrew Latham suggests a smart way to get ahead on your mortgage: Make payments biweekly instead of monthly. By paying half your monthly mortgage every two weeks, you’ll sneak 13 payments into a year, helping pay off principal faster and decrease overall interest. “On a \$200,000 mortgage with a 30-year term and 5 percent interest rate, it can save \$34,724 in interest and repay the mortgage nearly five years early,” says Latham.

8 AUTO Putting on the (Tire) Pressure

Some say there’s a direct link between tire pressure and the blood pressure of drivers across the country: When you neglect to check one, it actually raises the other. So, in addition to checking your tires monthly, inflate them to the recommended psi listed on the car-maker’s decal (found on your driver’s door jamb or in the owner’s manual), not to the psi printed on the tire. Tire pressure is based on the weight of your vehicle, not on the tire brand or tread style. **R**

HUMOR *in*
UNIFORM

My son was stationed in Korea, and I couldn't stop thinking about him. So I baked a batch of his favorite cookies, packed them in a shoebox, wrapped the box, and sent it halfway around the world.

When he came home on leave, I asked if he'd enjoyed the cookies. He gave me a quizzical look and said, "Mom, you sent me your red shoes."

—JOAN SHELTON
Raleigh, North Carolina

"Son, when the Marine Corps wants you to have a wife, you will be issued one."

—MARINE CORPS LT. GEN. LEWIS "CHESTY" PULLER (1898-1971)
to a Marine who asked permission to be married



"So, how did you do on your sniper exam?"

It's not news that seasoned Marines like to have fun with newbies. I had just landed on mess hall duty when my sergeant ordered me to double-time it over to another mess hall on base, ask for a much-needed item, and bring it back, pronto. After he told me what it was, I ran off, eager to fulfill my mission. When I arrived, I repeated

my order to the sergeant in charge: "I'm here to pick up three feet of salad bar."

It took a while before I realized what they were laughing about.
—LOREN DAWSON
Junction City, Kansas

GOT A STORY ABOUT *the military or your military family? It could be worth \$\$\$.* For details, go to *p. 2* or **RD.COM/SUBMIT**.



BEFORE



***“I lost 45 lbs
and have kept
it off! I feel
amazing, and
love what I see
in the mirror.”***

SONDRA W.

How to Increase Metabolism at Any Age

Study suggests that a low-glycemic high-protein diet can increase the metabolism. If you want to optimize your body's metabolism for more effective weight loss — all while targeting stubborn belly fat and improving your health along the way — Almased may be just what you were looking for. Supported by over 30 years of scientific research, Almased:

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Beyond Sauerkraut

IT'S OFTEN SAID that sauerkraut originated not in Germany, not in Austria, and not in a baseball stadium, but rather in China during the construction of the Great Wall. As the widely reported—yet fully unconfirmed—story goes, the builders subsisted on rice and cabbage, dousing the latter with rice wine to preserve it all winter long, which also made it sour.

While the real origin story remains unknown, what we do know is that the concept arose from a wintertime need to preserve produce, back when refrigeration wasn't a thing. As for the name, that does come from Germany. It means, simply, "sour cabbage."

The key to making sauerkraut is lacto-fermentation, which is what happens when you take cabbage and pack it with salt. This creates an environment hostile to the microbes that would normally come along and cause a food to rot. *Lactobacillus*, a type of probiotic (good) bacteria found

naturally on plants, is quite tolerant of salt—so upping the sodium stacks the deck in its favor. The salt draws water out of the vegetable, creating a brine, and the lactobacillus bacteria, thriving in their salty bath, eat the natural sugars in the cabbage, producing lactic acid (which is what makes sauerkraut sour) as a by-product. And voilà: The cabbage is fermented.

Lactobacillus ferments other foods as well, such as old-fashioned pickles (the shelf-stable ones in the grocery store are made with vinegar instead of fermentation) and many of the Korean pickled vegetables called kimchi. And while not by the same process, different species of lactobacillus also help turn milk into yogurt and cheese.

The American approach to sauerkraut—toss it on a hot dog, call it a day—springs from the European tradition of eating pickled cabbage with bratwurst and heavy smoked meats. You'll also find sauerkraut alongside the corned beef on a Reuben sandwich, but it works well with any rich, fatty food, thanks to its cutting tartness.

When you're shopping, try to get kraut from the refrigerated section—this is likely to be the fermented version that is still teeming with probiotics. (Putting it in the fridge slows the souring; without this step the kraut can get mushy and too sour.) The canned stuff is pasteurized, which means it's been cooked, and all that delightfully souring bacteria is dead. And what's the fun in that? **R**



CREAMY, KRAUT-Y POTATO SALAD

Cut 3 pounds skin-on red potatoes (about 7 medium) into slices 1 inch thick. Place potatoes in a medium pot and cover with at least 1 inch of cold water; season generously with salt (the water should taste slightly salty), bring to a simmer, and cook until potatoes are tender but still holding their shape, about 15 minutes. Drain and let cool. While the potatoes are cooking, cut 1 medium red onion into rings, then toss in a small mixing bowl with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup red wine vinegar. Let stand, stirring every few minutes, until onion rings are bright pink, about 20 minutes. Stir in 1 cup sour cream along with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup drained and chopped sauerkraut, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup minced fresh dill, and 2 tablespoons whole grain mustard. Season with salt and pepper. Gently stir the sour cream dressing and cooled potatoes until slices are well coated. Season with additional salt if desired. Serve right away, or refrigerate up to 8 hours before serving.

13 THINGS

What Your Pet Is Trying to Tell You

BY *Emily Goodman*



1 Put down your phone! Animals want our attention, and sometimes they're quite overt about asking for it. Antics are often our pets' way of telling us to stop what we're doing and play with them. It's why Fido constantly chases his tail and why Kitty keeps rolling around. A desperately bored pet may resort to "bad" behaviors to elicit a reaction—even a negative one!

2 Feed me. Sure, your dog loves you, but that's not why he's licking your face. A puppy learns to lick his mother's mouth to snag a little leftover

food, so Spot isn't kissing you in our sense of the word; he just wants a snack.

3 I'm stressed. Cat owners also misinterpret their furry friends' kisses. While a cat might lick you to show affection, sometimes she'll do it to soothe herself. One way to tell if her licking is stress-related is if it goes on for an extended period of time. Birds also overgroom when they feel anxious. Some will even pluck out their own feathers.

4 My tail tells all. Dogs wag their tails to the right when they see something (or someone) they want to approach, and to the left when they see something they want to avoid. When frightened, dogs tuck their tails in, while cats wrap theirs around themselves. And if a tabby's tail looks like a question mark, she's itching to play—especially if the tip twitches.

5 Don't dismiss my accidents. A house-trained dog that suddenly goes on the carpet could simply be dehydrated, but he could also have kidney failure, liver disease, or diabetes. And a cat that sprays outside her litter box might have kidney stones or a urinary tract infection, so mention your pets' accidents to the vet, especially if they keep happening. Once you rule out a medical issue, try getting another litter box for your cat. If he keeps missing, he probably dislikes the box or wants another. (Cats generally need more than one.)

6 I can't even look at you. At some point you've probably uttered these words to someone who made you angry. Dogs think similarly, avoiding eye contact with anyone who spoils their mood. Another sign of ire: yawning. A yawning pup may not

be tired but agitated, not bored but stressed. Similarly, lip-licking—when there isn't food around to trigger it—is another sign of duress.

7 Let's stay in. You might think your pooch is running around the backyard, having the time of his life while you're away. But the reality is that he's most likely just sitting in one spot for hours, anxiously waiting for you to return. Dogs actually prefer to be inside, ideally with their owners.

8 But I do need alone time. If your dog seems scared (because he's hiding, say, or excessively panting), but showing no obvious signs of distress, try giving him a break from people—yourself included. Even the most attention-hungry hound can benefit from having a calm space of his own to relax in, even if it's just a crate.

9 Take my rear end in your face as a compliment. When a cat presents you with his behind, it means he sees you as a maternal figure, since he used to do that as a kitten to get his mother to groom him. Another sure sign you've won his heart is if he blinks slowly while looking at you. He isn't tired: He's showing that he's comfortable letting his guard down around you. Likewise, a dog that shows you his belly isn't just inviting a rub. Rolling over is a sign of submission, which is how dogs convey trust.

10 My tummy hurts. If your dog arches his back while tucking his belly up, he's in pain—likely gastrointestinal discomfort, but it could also be his back. A crouching cat could

also be hurting, usually in the chest or abdomen. But if a tabby tilts her head to one side, it might mean she has pain there. If any of these postures persist, have your vet help you pin down the issue.

11 A storm is coming. When your dog bugs out, pay attention—especially if you live near a fault line. Even if you see clear skies, your pup might be sensing barometric pressure changes or even smelling the impending rain. The Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior found that dogs can detect earthquakes up to 20 hours ahead of time.

12 I might be depressed. Pets have mental health needs too. Disinterest in food

or favorite activities is a telltale sign of depression. A dog that pulls her ears back is likely experiencing anxiety (though she could also be suffering from an ear infection). Mention these behaviors to your vet, and don't be afraid to ask about pet antidepressants.

13 But you make me so happy! When they wiggle and wag their whole bodies, your dancing dogs and bouncing bunnies are literally jumping for joy. Birds that bob up and down and cats that come when you call them are showing their appreciation for you. And when your pets put their paws on you, seemingly for no reason, they're gently showing you their gratitude. **R**



Guilt by Association

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ALL
in a Day's
WORK

During a flight from Seattle to Chicago, my neighbor, a flight attendant, split the back of his pants. No problem—he simply turned around and stationed himself in front of the beverage cart, facing forward. It worked, or so he thought, until he got to the last row, and a female passenger leaned over and whispered, “Your fly is open.”

—YEFIM M. BRODD
Kirkland, Washington

The irate daughter of one of our nursing home residents stormed into my office demanding answers. She had



just read her father’s chart and couldn’t understand why he was so disliked by the staff. It took a while, but I was finally able to explain to her that the offending comment on the chart, “S.O.B.,” was a nursing abbreviation for “short of breath.”

—DENNIS BECHMANN
Jamestown, New York

Correction from Vulture.com: “This article originally claimed that Ben Platt’s *Dear Evan Hansen* haircut was a wig. It is, astoundingly, his own hair.”

SOURCE: BUZZFEED.COM

My coworker asked the tattoo artist to draw the Chinese character for “free” that he found using a translation app.

Turns out, it was very close to being accurate, but not quite. His new tattoo actually reads “tax free.”

SOURCE: BORED PANDA.COM

Every year, the prison where I work as a volunteer chaplain holds a training session for staff. This year, the instructor kicked things off by asking, “What kind of people do you work among?”

He was instantly bombarded with a slew of angry responses: “They’re lazy!” “They can’t be trusted!” “They steal!” “They lie!”

“And,” another colleague added, “some of the inmates aren’t all that nice, either.”

—H. D. PATTISON
Colorado Springs, Colorado

YOUR FUNNY WORK story could be worth \$\$\$*.* For details, go to p. 2 or RD.COM/SUBMIT.

911 AROUND THE GLOBE

◆ **Lure It with Jam**
Authorities in Poland received a report of an unusual animal lurking in a tree, terrorizing an apartment house. “People aren’t opening their windows because they’re afraid it will go inside,” the caller said. Officers wondered if the animal was a bird of prey, but the frightened caller said it more closely resembled an iguana. They were all wrong. The beast in question turned out to be a croissant someone had tossed out the window.

SOURCE: THE BBC

◆ **More Presents!**
At one point, Takashi Miyagawa, 39, was dating 35 women simultaneously. But where some might see a Casanova, others saw a cad. That’s

because he dated the 35 women just to get 35 birthday gifts. After a few grew suspicious, Miyagawa was arrested and charged with swindling them. One online commentator admitted, “He’s an awful person, but I envy his time-management skills.”

SOURCE: TIMES NOW NEWS.COM

◆ **Where Am I?**
After a hard night of drinking, a Turkish man woke up in the forest. As he headed home, he came upon a search party looking for a missing man. Being a good citizen, he offered to help—which he did until they began calling out a familiar name, his. Beyhan Mutlu had been reported missing by his wife, and the rescuers could now say that he had been found, with the help of Beyhan Mutlu.

SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Starting a job feels like you’re a new character on the tenth season of a TV show.

—[@3DLOOKS](https://twitter.com/3DLOOKS)

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Skin Care for Warmer Weather

*Simple steps to take
for healthy skin in
spring and summer*

BY Jenn Sinrich

ILLUSTRATIONS BY James Steinberg

THIS TIME OF year in most parts of the country, a change of weather means a change of clothing. Down and fleece outer garments get shed in favor of light sweaters and jackets, and eventually just T-shirts. But simply changing clothing isn't enough to keep our skin healthy as the seasons change. We asked dermatologists for their best tips on taking care of skin—the body's largest organ—as the temperature rises.

Pay attention to pollen

Temperature isn't the only thing that rises in spring. Pollen counts go up too, and allergies may be exacerbated. "Allergies to pollen or any other environmental allergen can create redness and inflammation underneath the eyes," says Whitney Bowe, MD, a dermatologist based in New York City. "When that happens, it makes under-eye bags larger and wrinkles around the eyes more pronounced." Talk to a dermatologist about prescription ingredients that can heal the skin and calm the inflammation. If you're prone to allergies, your doctor may recommend taking an over-the-counter nonsedating antihistamine each morning, for example, to help avoid flare-ups.

Up your SPF

Everyone should wear sunscreen year-round, but dermatologists agree that it's even more important during the warmer months. "Not only are you spending more time outside, but also the UVA/UVB rays can be more intense, and the damage accumulates over your lifetime," says Dendy Engelman, MD, a New York City-based dermatologist. "Incidental sun exposure, even for only 10 to 15 minutes a day, adds up over time and can cause significant sun damage and accelerated photoaging, hyperpigmentation, and wrinkles. Using a high-SPF sunscreen—30 SPF at minimum, and 50 SPF ideally—can reduce the accumulation of chronic UV damage that's linked to non-melanoma skin

I TRIED IT...**Mole Mapping**

Mole mapping is recommended for people at high risk for skin cancer, which includes me: I have fair skin, I'm covered in moles, and I have two grandparents who were diagnosed with melanoma. The procedure involves a skin specialist taking photographs of every mole, then watching for potentially dangerous skin changes. For my mole mapping, I stood in a room wearing only my underwear. I was self-conscious, but I'll take embarrassment over skin cancer any

day. I assumed a series of poses so the camera could capture every inch of skin. Thankfully the photos didn't reveal anything that needed to be biopsied or checked out further. All good until next year. —Ashley Lewis



cancer and aging.” (For more on how dermatologists detect skin cancer at its earliest stage, see “I Tried It” at left.)

Spring-clean your skin products

There are no U.S. Food and Drug Administration regulations for skin-care product expiration dates, though some products do show a suggested expiration date. But over time, products may discolor, smell funny, or become contaminated with bacteria. “Go through your skin-care products and sunscreens, and toss the things that have been around a little too long,” says Dr. Bowe. That includes cosmetics, shaving creams, and beard oil. Anything you apply near your lips or eyes should be tossed after a year. And don’t forget to clean your brushes, combs, sponges, and razors.

Consider your cleanser

Mild soap is useful in cold, dry weather, but a slightly more acidic cleanser will help to control shine and sweat more efficiently, especially for people whose skin is oily to start with. “This is particularly true as spring days become much warmer in the afternoon than the morning,” says dermatologist S. Manjula Jegasothy, MD, CEO and founder of Miami Skin Institute. “Your cleanser should keep your skin clean and sweat-free throughout the day, which a more acidic cleanser is likely to do.” Look for ingredients such as alcohol, salicylic acid, and glycolic acid.

Exfoliate extra

“Mild exfoliation, twice a week at most, will remove dull dead skin cells

from the skin surface,” says Tsippora Shainhouse, MD, a dermatologist based in Beverly Hills, California. “When dead skin cells are combined with sweat, grease, and skin-care products, they can clog pores and lead to acne.” Avoid cleansers that exfoliate with rough pieces such as shells, nuts, and microbeads. Look for gentler products that contain salts and sugars, or enzymatic scrubs with fruit acids.

Lighten up the lotion

In the winter, heavier face and body moisturizers help combat the cold and dry air, but when temperatures rise, so does humidity. “During the warmer seasons, lighter lotions will likely provide enough moisture for the skin, while heavier formulations may lead to clogged pores and breakouts,” says Melissa Piliang, MD, a dermatologist at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. Look for products that contain ceramides and hyaluronic acid, which are both hydrating agents.

Go easy on makeup

Heavy foundations and concealers can cause buildup and lead to breakouts. This is even more likely during the spring and summer, when heat and humidity can lead to sweat and clogged skin, says Dr. Engelman. “Switching to lighter products, such as a CC cream or mineral powder foundation, will balance out the extra oil production and leave your skin looking healthier,” she says.

Add an antioxidant

Antioxidants are particularly important during the summer, when stronger UV rays can damage unprotected skin. “Not only can too much sun lead to direct DNA damage, but it can also break down collagen and elastin, due to UV-induced free radicals,” explains Dr. Shainhouse. Apply an antioxidant serum, such as vitamin C, in the morning after cleansing your face and before applying sunscreen to help strengthen the skin barrier.

Reduce retinol

Many products marketed to both men and women contain the vitamin-A derivative retinol, a milder over-the-counter version of Retin-A, which is available by prescription only. The fountain-of-youth potion that promises to reduce fine lines and wrinkles, strengthen skin, and even out skin tone can make your skin more sensitive to sun. “Retinol boosts cell turnover, which means it eliminates dead skin cells and replaces them with new ones—and these healthy new cells are more sensitive and prone to burning from the sun’s rays,” says Joel Schlessinger, MD, a dermatologist in Omaha, Nebraska. You can still use retinol during the spring and summer months, but apply it at bedtime instead of in the morning, and use a strong sunscreen. “If your skin gets irritated by retinol use, reduce the frequency to only one or two times a week,” Dr. Shainhouse suggests. **R**

E-Bike Safety Tips

BY *Beth Weinhouse*



BEFORE YOU GO on your next two-wheeled adventure, make sure you're familiar with the ins and outs of bicycle safety. This holds true whether you're riding a traditional bike or an e-bike—one powered by an electric motor in addition to your pedaling.

Many of the safety recommendations are the same for both types of bikes. Wear a helmet. Ride with the flow of traffic rather than against it. Make sure you're visible to motorists (some e-bikes now come with lights). Know how to use your arm to signal turns (left: extend your left arm out to the side; right: extend your right arm

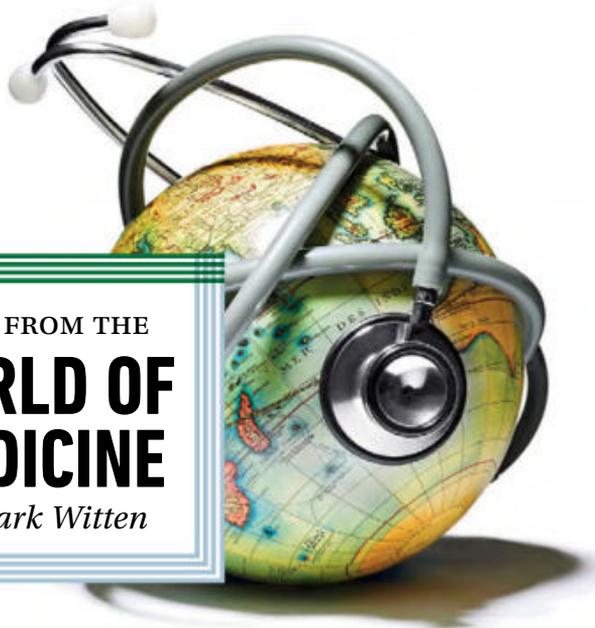
or bend your left arm up at a right angle). Don't talk on the phone, text, or listen to music. And if you're an e-bike rider, heed these tips too:

- **BE SURE YOUR BIKE IS READY TO RIDE.**

That starts with checking that the tires are inflated and the brakes are working properly. If the bicycle hasn't been used for a while, take it for a tune-up before you take it for a ride. "For an e-bike, also make sure your battery is charged," says Ash Lovell, electric bicycle policy director at People for Bikes, a cyclist advocacy organization. And before and after every ride, inspect your bicycle for damage.

- **BE AWARE OF YOUR SPEED.** This is important for e-bike riders. "With the ability to go faster comes the responsibility to know when you should slow down," says Lovell.

- **KNOW THE RULES OF THE ROAD.** "When you're riding in the street, even in a protected bike lane, read the signals, pay attention to the lane markings, and check the signage to see where e-bikes are allowed," Lovell says. Thirty-six states have adopted a classification system for e-bikes; signs in those states may specify which types of bikes are allowed on which roads and paths. Check the People for Bikes website (peopleforbikes.org) for more information. **R**



News FROM THE
**WORLD OF
MEDICINE**

BY Mark Witten

THERAPY FOR BACK PAIN

More than 80 percent of American adults will experience chronic lower back pain at some point in their lives—and it’s notoriously difficult to treat. Chronic pain can be like a false alarm stuck in the on position, with certain brain networks overreacting to even mild pain stimuli. In a University of Colorado study, two-thirds of the chronic back pain patients who underwent four weeks of pain reprocessing therapy (PRT) were pain-free or nearly pain-free after one year. In PRT sessions, patients learn to think about pain as safe, rather than threatening, as they do things they’d been afraid to do. These results provide strong evidence that psychological treatment can deliver lasting relief for chronic back pain, reducing the need for medications, surgeries, and other invasive treatments that can be costly, ineffective, and even dangerous.

Social Envy Is Toxic

Last year, a whistleblower from Facebook revealed that the social media giant knew from internal studies that one of its parent company’s platforms, Instagram, made people feel worse about themselves, contributing to increased depression and anxiety. This was attributed to users constantly evaluating themselves against others. Perhaps unsurprisingly, social comparisons are bad for your physical health as well. According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, people who ranked their social status low in relation to others had higher blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and body mass index, raising their risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Researchers suggest counterbalancing time spent on social media by making an effort to join supportive, inclusive social groups, whether online or off.

LEVI BROWN

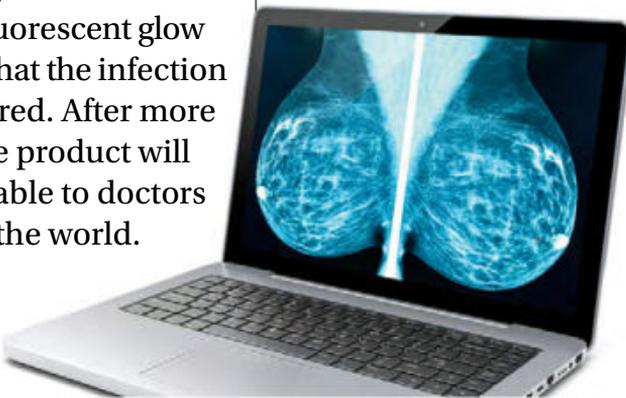


“Smart” Bandages Detect Infection

Usually, if you want to see whether a wound is healing properly, you need to remove the bandage, which can be painful and risky, giving bacteria and other pathogens a chance to attack. But now, Australian researchers at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University have developed “smart” wound dressings that detect biochemical changes in the skin. The dressings glow brightly under UV light if infection starts to set in. Or, if the wound was already infected, the absence of the fluorescent glow signals that the infection has cleared. After more tests, the product will be available to doctors around the world.

AI HELPS RULE OUT BREAST CANCER

Mammograms help save lives through early detection of cancer. Unfortunately, screening is about four times more likely to miss detecting cancer in women with extremely dense breasts, who have twice the risk of developing breast cancer as the average woman. Now, a Netherlands study has shown that an artificial intelligence-based screening tool currently being tested can rule out cancer for 40 percent of patients with extremely dense breasts and no detectable lumps. This will allow radiologists to focus on less-certain cases more quickly.



Language Brain Gains

A University of Kansas study has shown that, if given the opportunity for immersive learning, adults can pick up a new language almost as easily as kids do. When learning a language, the brain builds white-matter connections between brain areas, leading to better memory skills, focus, and agility in switching from one task to another.

Baking with Less Salt Has Benefits

Globally, people consume an average of 10.1 grams of salt per day—twice the recommended maximum amount and a rate that raises the risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. According to a University of Illinois study, reducing salt in baking doesn't mean decreasing taste or leavening ability. The researchers suggest using half the amount of salt called for in recipes. **R**

LAUGHTER

THE BEST *Medicine*

BESTSELLERS WRITTEN BY MY UNAPPROVING MOTHER



bob

No one or thing is immortal ... especially these jokes:

- ◆ The guy who stole my diary just died. My thoughts are with his family.
- ◆ I was reading a great book about a death-defying dog the other day. It was impossible to put down.
- ◆ I'll never forget my granddad's last words to me just before

he died: "Are you still holding the ladder?"

What's Up with "Up"? We seem to be mixed up about "up." Look up "up" in a dictionary and you'll find about 30 definitions. It's easy to understand "up," meaning toward the sky or at the top of the list, but when we awaken in the morning, why do we wake

up? At a meeting, why does a topic come up? Why do we speak up, and why is it up to the assistant to write up a report?

We call up our friends, brighten up a room, polish up the silver, warm up the leftovers, and clean up the kitchen. We lock up the house and fix up the old car. At other times, people stir up trouble,

line up for tickets, and think up excuses. To be dressed is one thing but to be dressed up is special.

And “up” is contradictory: When it threatens to rain, we say it’s clouding up. When the sun comes out, we say it’s clearing up. If it rains, no worries since the earth will soak it up. Of course, if it doesn’t rain for a while, things dry up.

One could go on and on, but I think I’ll just shut up.

SOURCE: PLANET PROCTOR

What do you get when a telescope bangs into a microscope? A kaleidoscope.
—Submitted by JULIA K. Earlville, New York

As the hedge fund manager steps out of his Porsche, a truck goes racing by, taking the door off the hinges.

“My Porsche! My beautiful silver Porsche is ruined!” he screams.

A police officer

on the scene shakes his head in disgust. “Unbelievable,” he says. “You’re so focused on your possessions that you didn’t even realize your left arm was shorn off when the truck hit you.”

The hedge fund manager looks down in absolute horror.

“Oh, no!” he cries. “My Rolex!”

SOURCE: WATCHUSEEK.COM

Me, arriving late to things: “Sorry, supply chain problems.”

—[@DELIA_CAI](#)

GOT A FUNNY JOKE?

It could be worth \$\$\$.
For details, go to p. 2 or [RD.COM/SUBMIT](#).



WHERE, OH WHERE?

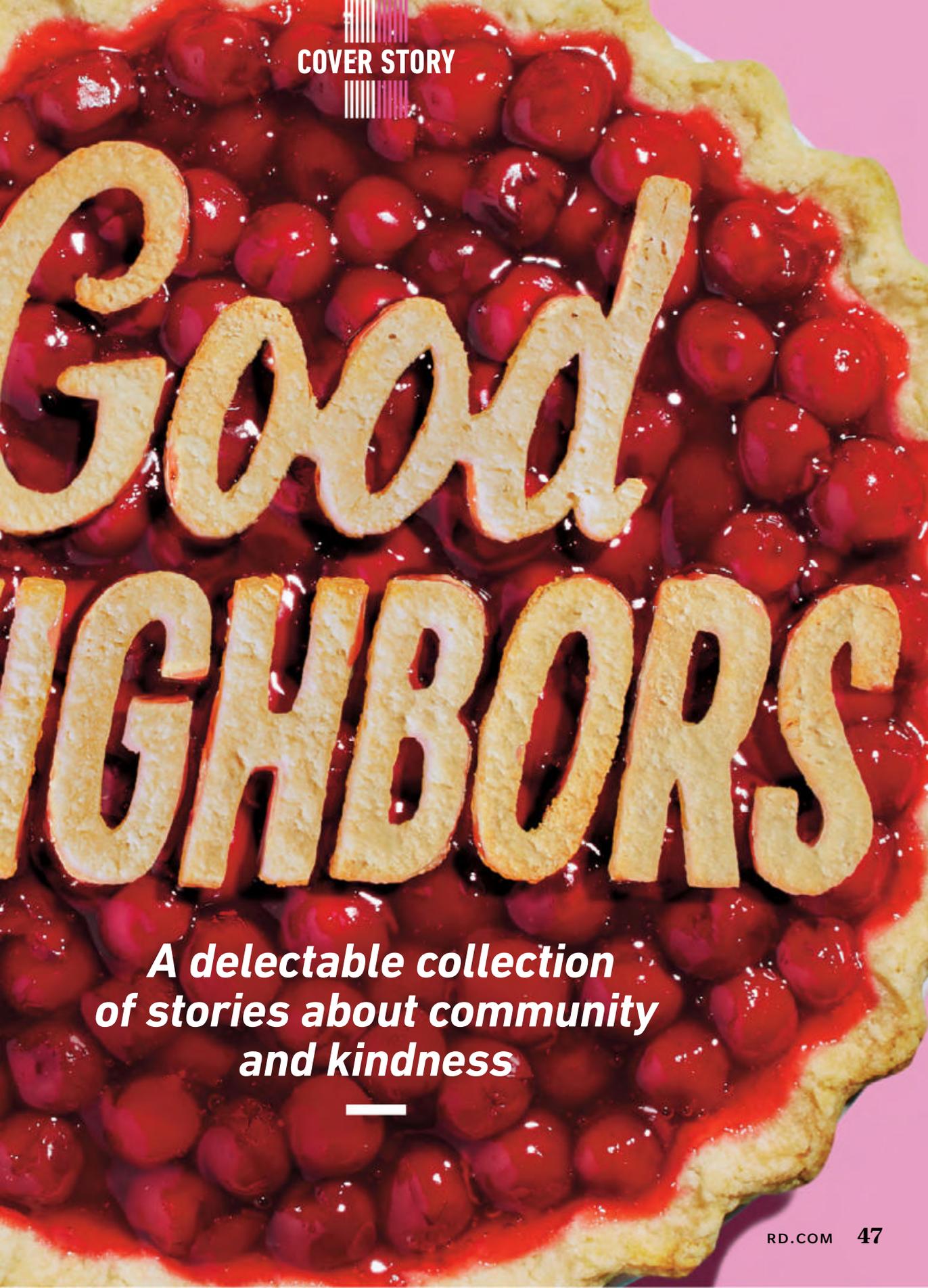


LOOKING AT THIS lush landscape, you wouldn't guess that back in the summer of 2018, just as farmers here were preparing to harvest their best wheat crop in decades, a series of terrible fires scorched these fields black. Resilient farmers then spent the fall and winter planting cover crops to salvage the more than 200,000 acres of soil that burned that fire season—the worst in the area's history. This photo was taken the following spring, showing the verdant result of all their hard work. But where is it? (*Answer on PAGE 115.*)

- A** Dufur, Oregon
- B** Hardin, Montana
- C** Williston, North Dakota
- D** Colby, Kansas



PHOTOGRAPHS BY *K. Synold*



COVER STORY

Good Neighbors

*A delectable collection
of stories about community
and kindness*



THE SUNSHINE MAYOR

BY *Cathy Free*
FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

ALMOST EIGHT YEARS ago, Al Nixon decided to begin each day from a bench with a spectacular view of the St. Petersburg, Florida, waterfront.

“I call it ‘life rising’ because watching a sunrise makes me feel centered before starting my day,” said Nixon, who

works for the city’s water department.

A year later, a woman stopped to say hello, and she said something that changed his perspective on his daily ritual. “She said, ‘You know, every morning when I see you sitting here, I know that everything is going to be OK,’” Nixon recalled. “That’s when I knew: I needed to pay attention to the people walking past. I needed to make eye contact and let people know that we mattered to each other.”

Instead of staring straight ahead at the waterfront, Nixon started smiling at people and striking up conversations. And pretty soon, more than a few early risers began joining him on the bench, sometimes unburdening themselves, asking him for advice

INSET PHOTO: COURTESY AL NIXON

about relationships, careers, and personal problems.

"I was happy to listen," Nixon, 59, said. "I wanted them to walk away knowing they didn't have to feel alone. When you're in your 50s and 60s or beyond, a lot of people feel their purpose hasn't been fulfilled. At this stage in life, this is definitely my purpose."

So, every morning, weather permitting, Nixon, who has three grown children and a long-term significant other, rises at 4:30. He puts on a fedora, sips a cup of coffee, then drives seven miles to the waterfront, where he'll stay for two hours. His presence and his openness to listen have led some to nickname him the Sunshine Mayor.

"Al is this calm, constant presence," said Jeff Franzen, 64, a retired real estate developer who met Nixon while taking a walk along the waterfront a few years ago. "His unique gift is that he listens to everyone."

It's more than that, said Dee Glowa, who is in her late 50s. She met Nixon while out strolling three years ago. "He listens without judgment and without any kind of return expected."

While most people simply wave or drop by briefly to make small talk, others are anxious to step into his "office" and spend a few minutes with someone who will listen.

No matter what problem a person wants to air, Nixon lends an ear. "You have to have an open heart and an open head, because you never know who's going to walk up and what they

might need," Nixon said. "Every person who stops by the bench deserves my undivided attention."

He remembers the day a couple came by to talk about problems in their relationship. "The husband was always working, rarely home," Nixon said. "It was ruining their marriage. I told him: 'My friend, if your wife's revelation didn't scare you, then maybe the possibility of losing her will.'"

"HIS UNIQUE GIFT IS THAT HE LISTENS TO EVERYONE."

Nixon was right, the man admitted. "He started to cry and agreed that he needed to slow down," said Nixon. "We all hugged each other, and we became friends after that. I still see them every now and then over lunch."

No topic is off limits, Nixon said, but some people sit down and don't want to talk at all. They simply want to sit next to someone and share the silence.

"A woman stopped once and said, 'I just want to sit here with you,'" he recalled. "We stared at the water for an hour, then she said thank you and walked away. She just wanted a moment of peace and to know she wasn't alone. And in that moment, in that hour, on that morning, she truly wasn't." **R**

THE WASHINGTON POST (JULY 30, 2021), COPYRIGHT © 2021 BY THE WASHINGTON POST

OUT ON A LIMB

BY *Dana Hedgpeth*

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST



FOR THE MOST part, Hank, a two-year-old tan-and-white rescue cat, is a homebody—and for good reason. The one time he got out of his yard in Washington, DC, he managed to get stuck in a 60-foot-tall tree for five days and four nights with no food or water.

Hank's big adventure started last November 6. Delores Bushong, his 75-year-old owner, had just returned from a farmers market when she realized Hank hadn't come in for his midday snack. She called his name, in alleys and streets around her home. As it got dark, she began to worry. Then she heard mewling, looked up, and spotted Hank, perched on a branch near the top of a neighbor's tree.

Bushong believes Hank got under

a fence and then became spooked by some dogs. The more scared he got, the higher he climbed.

"Cats have an amazing ability to climb up trees, but actually they aren't that good at climbing down," said Dan D'Eramo, director of field services for the Humane Rescue Alliance (HRA).

Bushong, now worried about getting Hank down, asked the HRA to take the lead, but it was no easy task. HRA called the fire department, but it declined to help, citing safety concerns. Then Bushong called a construction company to ask about renting scaffolding but was told she would have to book the equipment 48 days in advance.

Next she reached out to a local tree company, Casey Trees, where she

INSET PHOTO: COURTESY HUMANE RESCUE ALLIANCE

volunteers, helping with planting and trimming. But the crew that came out analyzed Hank's predicament and said it wasn't safe for a person to go up into the tree because the branches weren't sturdy.

Bushong was crushed. "To realize something you love is in trouble and you personally can't do anything about it is very frustrating," she said.

Cue the neighbors. Ed Baptiste, whose tree Hank had climbed, let Bushong sit in his backyard and call to Hank. Another neighbor donated a can of sardines, hoping it might entice the hungry cat to come down. Nearby dog owners took their pets on walks instead of letting them out in their yards to avoid further spooking Hank.

One neighbor suggested Bushong call a local business, EJ's Pest Control, which had a tall ladder. She did, and the owner, Ijeoma Maduforo-Barry, told her she was welcome to it. "I don't have pets, but I'm human, and I do have a soft heart," said Maduforo-Barry. Unfortunately, the 42-foot ladder proved too short.

By day five, nothing had worked. That's when Lydia Krassensky, a veterinary assistant at HRA, told another staffer how her sister and brother-in-law got their cat down from a tree. They created a makeshift pulley system by looping a rope around a tall branch, then raising a basket with some of the owners' personal items. The cat, lured by the familiar scents, climbed into the basket and was

lowered from the tree. D'Eramo decided to try this approach with Hank.

Bushong filled a small crate with some of Hank's favorite things: catnip, food, a pair of her slippers, a fuzzy blanket. They called it Hank's party pack. With the help of volunteers from Casey Trees, they used a contraption that shot a beanbag attached to a rope high into the tree.

They got lucky on the first try, as the rope caught a branch directly above Hank. Pulling on the other end of the rope, they positioned Hank's party pack just beneath him. To their great delight, he jumped in, and they lowered him.

Once on terra firma, Bushong scooped Hank into her arms, cuddling him hard as he purred. Afterward, they went inside and ate, and Hank rested in his favorite chair.

The next day, Bushong recalled, when Hank wanted to go outside, "I said, 'Oh no.'" After some fence repairs, though, she let him out in her backyard—where he seems content to stay.

Hank's adventure taught his grateful owner a lesson about neighbors helping neighbors. "I can't believe how many people went out of their way to help me with this cat," she said. "No one ever said, 'You're being ridiculous.' It made me feel good that I live in a neighborhood where people would do whatever they could to get him down. It gave me hope." **R**

THE WASHINGTON POST (NOVEMBER 26, 2021), COPYRIGHT © 2021 BY THE WASHINGTON POST



NOTHING BUT NET

BY *David Waldstein*
FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

ONE OF THE most gratifying sounds in sports is the whoosh of a basketball snapping the netting on a perfect swish. Take away the net and all that's left is the unsatisfying silence of a ball pushing air molecules around as it sails through the

rim. Did it even go through? Sometimes it's hard to tell.

That's why Anibal Amador, a former real estate agent from New York City, regularly dips into his own pocket to buy brand-new nets for playground rims. For the most part, the city does not provide them.

"Without the nets, it is just not good," Amador said. "No one prefers to play that way."

So, for the past few years, with the help of a stepladder he brings from his apartment, Amador has been buying basketball nets and fastening them to the rims at a handful of playgrounds

INSET PHOTO: JEENAH MOON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

near his home in mid-Manhattan.

The New York City Parks Department maintains 1,800 basketball courts around the city's five boroughs, where some of the best games in history have been staged without a single fan watching. It isn't feasible to keep nets on all the rims in all the parks, so the city doesn't even try.

"I understand it," Amador said, "because there are just so many parks that they would have to be putting up nets all the time. That's where I come in."

Amador's small civic gesture is one of many little acts of altruism that tend to go unnoticed yet help sustain a small measure of quality of life in a crowded metropolis where the mythology of playground basketball is a matter of city lore.

Last year, a group of players at one playground, St. Vartan Park, waited patiently as Amador, then 55, carefully balanced atop his ladder, finished fastening new nets to the clips under the rims before wiping down the backboard with a rag. When he was done, they cheered.

"It is much better for everyone with the nets," Amador said, sharing a huge smile.

Originally from Rio Piedras in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Amador moved to New York City almost 30 years ago, working in real estate until recently. He is looking to branch out into something else but, in the meantime, he plays basketball two or three times a week, and replaces the nets at his

favorite courts as needed, roughly every nine weeks.

"The amount of play that these parks get is surprising," he said. "It's a lot, and the nets really don't last."

"I THOUGHT HE WORKED FOR THE CITY," SAID ONE GRATEFUL PLAYER.

But at St. Vartan, Amador makes sure that every good shot is a splash-down through the feathery nets he buys on the Internet for about \$10 apiece.

Once, when he was putting up some new nets, one of the regular players gave Amador \$20 to help defray his costs. The player was astounded that someone would be so generous with his money and time. "I thought he worked for the city," the man said. "He was very meticulous. And then he brings out a long brush and wipes down the backboards. I've never seen that before."

Amador says he does it simply for the love of the game.

Because every great hoop star has a nickname—LeBron is King James, Earvin Johnson is Magic—Amador was asked if he had one.

Beaming, he replied, "I was thinking maybe ... the Net Changer." **R**

THE NEW YORK TIMES (JULY 23, 2021), COPYRIGHT © 2021 THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY

UP FROM THE WELL

BY Robert Kiener



AS THE LATE afternoon sun beat down on his Rock Port, Missouri, farm last May, Brandon Leseberg finished feeding his cows and decided to call it a day. As they often did, his two sons, Louie, 6, and Everett, 3, had tagged along.

As they headed for the house, the two boys ran ahead of their father, who stopped to close the gate. Louie paused at a water spigot atop an old well to quench his thirst. Unknown to the Lesebergs, the board covering the well had, over time, grown brittle. When Louie stepped on it, it caved in.

Brandon had just finished latching

the gate when he turned around and saw only his youngest son.

"Where's Louie?" he shouted.

"He fell in the hole!" Everett said.

Brandon, 37, quickly realized what had happened. Noooo! he thought. Louie can barely swim!

He ran to the well and heard Louie splashing and gurgling quite a ways below. Instinctively, he jumped in.

As he fell some 70 feet down the 24-inch-wide brick-lined well, Brandon heard Louie screaming. Somehow Brandon managed to grab on to a pipe that ran down the side of the well, which slowed his descent

INSET PHOTO: TYNE MORGAN WITH US FARM REPORT

and kept him from crushing his son.

Brandon hit the frigid water at the bottom of the well. He popped his head out of the water and grabbed Louie, who was panicked, trying to stay afloat in water that was too deep for either of them to stand. Knowing they could tread ice-cold water for only so long, Brandon hoisted his son onto his chest as he wedged his own legs and back against the narrow walls for support, his body still partly submerged.

"All right, Dad, you can pull us out now," Louie said.

If only it were that easy. There was no way he could climb out. The pipe that he'd grabbed during his fall was too slippery to be of any use. There was only one way out. Looking up to see Everett peering down at them from the top of the well, Brandon shouted, "Everett, you're going to have to be a big boy and save us. Run to the road and stand by the mailbox until someone stops. Tell them we need help. And Everett, stay off the road!"

Everett did as he was told.

Minutes passed like hours as Brandon, clutching his shivering son, continued to arch his back and brace his shoulders and legs against the well's brick walls. Five minutes. Ten minutes. There was no sign of Everett. "Where is he?" Brandon said to himself as he wondered, Will we make it?

Finally, Everett's face appeared above the well. "Daddy, are you still down that hole?"

"Yes. Did you get some help?"

"No."

Brandon's heart sank. "That's OK, honey. But you have to go back out to the road and get someone to stop. OK, Everett?"

"OK, Daddy."

About 15 minutes later, Christi and Mark McKenney, nearby farmers, were driving by the Leseberg farmstead when they noticed Everett alone by the side of the road, waving. They pulled over and asked if he was OK. "My daddy's in a hole," he told them.

The couple piled Everett into their pickup and drove onto the farm, and the boy pointed them to the well. Mark dialed 911 while Christi called another neighbor.

After hearing from Christi, 45-year-old Dan Athen ran to his barn and grabbed a thick 85-foot rope. Then he and his son Ryan, 13, sped to the Lesebergs' farm. The pair leaped out of the pickup and sprinted to the well.

"Brandon," Dan shouted, "it's Dan Athen. We're going to send a rope down to you."

Brandon shouted back, "OK, I'll send Louie up first."

That was a surprise; Dan had no idea that Louie was also in the well.

There was no time to mull it over. Each second in the well meant a greater risk of hypothermia. After a call from Mark, Eric Duncan, who works on Brandon's farm, and his friend Jacob McKenney arrived to help. After Dan tossed the rope down

the well, Brandon tied it around Louie, then shouted, "You can pull now!"

The neighbors started hauling up Louie but were puzzled by how heavy the small boy was. They gave another hard tug. Something seemed to break free, and the men hoisted Louie up and out of the well. When he emerged, they were shocked to see wires wrapped around his arm. Louie had somehow gotten entangled with the well's pump and its wiring, which had weighed him down.

THE NEIGHBORS GRABBED THE ROPE AND BEGAN PULLING.

But now he was safe. "You're out, buddy! You're out!" said Eric, as others carefully unwrapped the tangled wires from his arm. Then Eric rushed Louie to his pickup, where he bundled him in several hoodies and turned the heater up full blast.

The neighbors now turned their attention to Brandon. But there was a hitch. He was a big guy, too heavy to pull out of the well using just the rope as they had done with Louie. Waiting for the emergency rescue team to arrive might have been a wise move, but who knew when it would show up? Besides, their friend was freezing down there. Of course they were going to get him out.

After a brief confab, they decided to

use the foundation of the old windmill that still stood over the well as a hoist to help pull Brandon up. They tossed down one end of the rope and he tied it around himself.

"I'm ready to go!" he shouted.

After looping their end of the rope over the old windmill frame, each of the five neighbors grabbed a portion of rope and began pulling. Brandon helped by gripping the well's pipe as best he could as he ascended toward the circle of blue sky at the top of the well.

"Hang on, Brandon," the team shouted as they hoisted him up.

Forty-some minutes after he'd jumped into the well to save his son, Brandon emerged, cold and wet. Just as his neighbors reached out to grab him, he collapsed to the ground, exhausted. A minute later, the first responders arrived.

Other than some nasty scratches, Brandon was fine. Louie, though, suffered hypothermia, as well as deep bruising from the wires that had entangled him. He also had a punctured lung, which doctors told Brandon was likely a result of the rope around his chest. Still, he was healthy enough to return to school a week later.

While all the rescuers have been hailed as heroes, Dan Athen isn't buying it. "We're just neighbors helping neighbors," he says before shining the spotlight on someone else. "If there is a hero in this story, it's three-year-old Everett. He's a real lifesaver." **R**



FRIENDS, INDEED

BY *Reader's Digest* Readers

A Treasured Friend

I had just gone through three big life changes within nine months: a divorce after 32 years of marriage, a move, and receiving custody of my 22-month-old granddaughter. At the same time, an old college friend was diagnosed with a terminal illness and asked me to reach out to some of our classmates to let them know. One of them, Molly, was the first to our friend's bedside. We hadn't spoken in decades, but we kept in touch through the following weeks.

It was very overwhelming to raise a toddler and adjust to the heartbreak and depression. One day, I came

home to a gaily decorated box filled with birthday gifts for my granddaughter. It was from Molly. We received a similar box with Christmas gifts for both of us soon after. We've received them every birthday, Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, and Halloween for the past four years.

I can't tell you how excited my granddaughter is to open these treasure boxes, but I was also buoyed by the kindness. During a year in which I was struggling with so many life changes, Molly's extended thoughtfulness helped keep me afloat.

—ROBERTA EDGAR WHITENIGHT
Warrington, Pennsylvania

Carrying the Day

I bought a Little Tikes car for the kids but found out too late that it was too big to fit into my sedan. A woman in the parking lot noticed me struggling and offered to put the car in her minivan and follow me home. I never forgot her kindness.

Two years later, I noticed someone struggling to fit patio furniture into her car. This time, I was the “woman with a minivan.” I told her the Little Tikes story and that it was my pleasure to pay it forward. We loaded the furniture and I followed her home. She and I stayed in touch, and 25 years later, LeAnne and I are still friends.

—MICHELE LEVINE

Silver Spring, Maryland



Just the Ticket

In 1991, I was taking a group of Black high school students to attend a lecture by author and former *Reader's Digest* writer Alex Haley. I was annoyed because another teacher who was supposed to help had flaked at the last minute. I was trying to figure out how to stretch my already thin teacher paycheck when a woman approached and asked if we had tickets yet. She promptly handed over

enough extras for the whole group, then disappeared into the crowd.

For students who hadn't considered themselves intellectuals, it was life-changing to be surrounded by academic role models who looked like them. Many are now educators and describe that night as pivotal. I wish there was some way to inform that woman of the impact her generosity had.

—DIXIE ROSS *Austin, Texas*

Lending an Ear

I was living paycheck to paycheck, and most days my fridge held only condiments. While pumping away my last dollars at a gas station, the father of a good friend pulled in. He was a farmer and the driver's education teacher at school. He jumped out of his truck and greeted me with his booming voice: "Hi! Do you like corn?"

He gave me instructions for how to make "the perfect loaded ear of corn" as he filled my backseat with countless ears of sweet corn. I went home and made the corn exactly as he'd instructed. That night I ate the most delicious dinner I'd had in a while.

I ran into him again years later and told him how he'd unknowingly fed me for days. He dismissed his kindness with a smile and laugh, but I could tell he was pleased. Thank you, Mr. Henry Bohlen. You made such a difference in a struggling young adult's life. I'll be forever grateful.

—NANCI KING-STERETT
Biggsville, Illinois

A Change of Heart

My son needed a diaper change right when we arrived for our day at the zoo. In the changing stall, I realized I had only one diaper left in the bag. I hated explaining to my daughter that we had to go home without seeing any animals. She was disappointed but didn't argue, which made it even sadder.

When we emerged from the stall, a woman was waiting for us with a

spare diaper in hand. We could stay at the zoo after all! This stranger turned our bad memory into a precious one.

—RENE BANE *Bowie, Maryland*

Instant Friends

A big family walked into the small waiting area at our local steakhouse, and my friend's husband jumped up to help an elderly woman to his seat. Our groups chatted as we waited and were laughing like old friends before we knew it.

We stopped at one another's tables several times throughout the night. It felt as if we were having dinner together, only at separate tables.

They came to say goodbye while we were still eating, explaining that they'd been a bit uneasy about stopping because it was a predominantly White area, and they were Black. We told them we had loved their company and wished them a safe drive. When we were finally ready to leave, the server told us they'd already paid our bill, desserts included.

—LINDA ORSINI *Fair Lawn, New Jersey*

Forever in Our Good Book

In a few years, my daughter Olivia would be diagnosed with autism, ADHD, and a hearing impairment. But on this morning at a pancake house, I knew only that she was an extremely challenging (and adorable) two-year-old. Luckily, most of the other diners seemed entertained when Olivia toddled up to their table

and introduced herself. She spent an especially long time at a table of older gentlemen, one of whom eventually walked her back to where we were sitting. He told me they'd loved Olivia's company, and asked for our mailing address.

A few weeks later, we received a package from him containing the book *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch and Sheila McGraw. It took Olivia and me several reads to get through it without crying.

Now she is about to graduate from high school. We still sing the book's song to each other every night: "I love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be." Then we hug. Sometimes twice. That gentleman's kindness has made a long-lasting difference in our lives.
—BONNIE WEISS *Duvall, Washington*

Be Our Guests

Years ago, when my daughter was four years old, we went on a trip to Orlando, pinching pennies for weeks beforehand in hopes that we could spend a day at Disney World. Waiting in line

Are Your Neighbors the Best?

Great people are the secret sauce for the Nicest Places in America, our annual collection of stories about towns, neighborhoods, and businesses where people are kind, differences are celebrated, and the Golden Rule is as instinctive as "please" and "thank you." *If you've seen something in your community and thought "Now this is what I'd like to see in the news cycle," now is your chance to tell us all about it (and see terms), at rd.com/nicest.*

for tickets, I was growing less and less confident that we'd saved enough to afford them.

Out of nowhere, a man walked up and offered us free tickets. He told us that he and his wife were park employees. They got the tickets as a perk and didn't want them to go to waste. We thanked them profusely and walked through the gates of the Magic Kingdom together. They even got us discounts on souvenirs. Then they shooed us off and told us to go have a wonderful day.

—KAREN MILLS-TRIBBLE
Richmond, Kentucky 



It Passes the Smell Test

"Muffins" spelled backward is what you do when you take them out of the oven.

 @SAOIRSERAET



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A N D H E R E .



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The Hole in the Fence

A child's unlikely friendship with an unseen neighbor transforms in isolation

BY *Adrian Van Young*

FROM **GUERNICA**

ONE DAY, MY SON befriends the nun. It starts with voices in the yard. Through the glass kitchen doors where I stand chopping onions, I hear Sebastian's voice and then a woman's. Sebastian, woman—back and forth. Sebastian is five, and when I come out to check on him, his face is pressed into the slats of the fence in the backyard.

This part of New Orleans is called Hollygrove—what Lil Wayne, who

grew up here, refers to as “the Holy Mecca.” I’ve also heard it called Pigeon Town, Leonidas, or, in faintly ominous tones, “the fruit streets”—a modest subset of what locals call Uptown, with its grand columned houses and clothing boutiques. It’s working-class, mostly, with middle-class fringes: White, Black, and Latinx.

We’ve lived here since the summer of 2014, a month before our son was born, when two friends and I unloaded a U-Haul while my wife,

hugely pregnant, supervised in the heat.

Hard to say what Sebastian and the woman are discussing. Immersive to him, something else to the woman: Bemusing? Disarming? I really can't say. But I hear traces of it, whatever it is, in the gentle upspeak of the fence-talker's voice, the emphatic, reiterative questions she poses.

Beyond that fence reside the nuns—a whole nun condo, two stories tall and eggshell blue. The nuns were there before we came. I had imagined uncanny habits with shadows inside them, but these are chill, back-to-the-land nuns. Sometimes I see their lights at night, the mellow, anonymous squares of their windows.

The woman says, "You wait right here; I'll be right back."

I wait for Sebastian to turn, but he lingers, enraptured. I can see the tense shape of his young, restive body, the chicken wings flexing beneath his slight shoulders.

"Stand back," says the sister when she returns. There's a whirring. A circle in the wooden fence, roughly the size of a baseball, drops out of sight. The saw blade retreats from the circle.

The hole reveals little of the woman who made it. I see her stoop to pick up the missing piece.

"Dad!" Sebastian spins around. "Sandy just drilled out a hole in the fence so Sandy and me can talk!" he says.

"I see that," I say. I hadn't known her name was Sandy.

I hear the saw start up again. Sandy tosses half the fence circle through the hole and Sebastian picks it up. "I'll keep half and you keep half," she says. For the nun and my son, this is just the beginning.

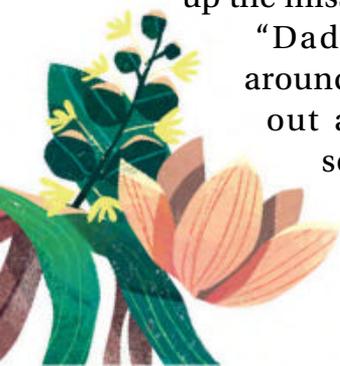
My wife, Darcy Roake, takes the little half-moon that Sandy sawed out of the fence and puts it on Sebastian's mantel between the picture of whales and the Bluebird of Happiness.

Over the next few weeks, then months, Sebastian's and Sandy's murmuring voices continue.

Most days Sandy is out doing whatever she does in her garden, and whenever Sebastian is outside I see him circling near the fence that isn't a fence anymore, but a portal. Some days my son just goes to stand at the hole, yelling, "Sandy! Saaaaaan-dyyyyy!" with a mournful exuberance. It's never summoned her outside, but she must hear him out there.

Sandy's days are busy. She has that vibe of an alpha nun, keeping the other nuns humble and spiffy. I hear their voices in the garden, shooting the breeze on their way to do errands, mumbling about the heat. Youth groups arrive and embark cheerily upon team-building efforts, their college voices floating up, but none of these kids holds a candle to Sandy. Sebastian is a child transfixed.

Partly due to the fact that these hangouts with Sandy provide me





with a short respite from imaginative play and fetching snacks, and partly because of an ear surgery that rendered me partially deaf on one side, all I really get are snatches.

“We did watercolors today at my school.”

“Oh yeah?” Sandy asks him. “And what did you make?”

“I painted a monster,” says my son.

Or: “Wheeler and Jackson were playing football, and they told me I couldn’t play.”

“That wasn’t very nice,” says Sandy. “Did that hurt your feelings?”

“Yes?” says my son, in that way he has sometimes of answering a question and asking another one in the same breath.

“Did you let them know that?” says Sandy.

I can’t hear how he responds. A crackle of jealousy runs through me. When I get him from school at the end of the day, I’m always full of questions for him: “What did you do?” “Make any new friends?” Most of the time he’s taciturn; sometimes he’ll try to change the subject. For the moment, I stand in the kitchen, eavesdropping.

When Sebastian wasn’t passing messages to Sandy, he enjoyed a river of playmates who deluged our house every day around 5 p.m. He was overjoyed that our house had become the neighborhood hangout, but sometimes the constant company left me feeling like Sebastian’s hamster, which had never bargained on 15 child owners. It was passed from hand to hand, and when it was finally put back in its cage it was wild-eyed, its fur matted

and sticky with ice cream and juice.

It's late winter of 2020, and the raucous visits of the neighbor children have stopped. Five p.m. is more than quiet. There's a tension or longing that hangs in the air, reminding us of what we're missing. Sebastian and Sandy are friends. They not only keep chatting through the hole, they also exchange gifts. A kaleidoscope materializes, then a Hot Wheels car. It's unclear what Sebastian gives Sandy in return.



THEY NOT ONLY KEEP
CHATTING THROUGH
THE HOLE, THEY ALSO
EXCHANGE GIFTS.



We are in the early, anxious weeks of coronavirus, but we reluctantly let Sebastian keep trading a shared art project with Sandy under the fence. More than the fact of their friendship alone, which my wife and I find wholly novel and charming, the nun who lives behind the fence is the first friend Sebastian has made on his

own, and we'd never deprive him of something like that.

They push shells and leaves that they've found through the hole. They ask and answer endless questions. Sometimes there is silence, Sebastian sitting with knees drawn up and his back to the fence while Sandy paces.

Sebastian runs inside one day and announces that Sandy has left something "too big for the hole" for him on the porch. It's a large cardboard box filled with knickknacks: sponge brushes and tubes of paint, wearable butterfly wings made of paper, a partial Hot Wheels racing track.

We've been in isolation for a month when I see Sandy in person. The day is any other day, as we've come to perceive time since COVID-19 began: Sebastian is hunting around near the fence while I attempt some yard work.

I hear Sandy's voice floating over the top of the fence with the hole. "I thought maybe Sebastian could come for a playdate. I've got some bricks here and they need painting yellow."

I'm not sure what to do at first, but my wife wants to go and so does Sebastian. We ring the bell on Sandy's porch. Sandy's yard is sweet with the smell of flowers; tulips and rosebushes bloom at the edges.

The first thing Sandy does when she answers the door is point to a row of concrete blocks in front of the curb to her house. She's a middle-aged woman with brown hair cut in a pageboy. Her eyes are squinty, foxed with mirth,

a spray of freckles on her nose. She wears sandals with cuffed jeans, her T-shirt tucked into the waist. She's shorter than I thought she'd be. She explains that she's tired of the whole neighborhood blocking the path to her door with cars. It delights me that Sandy, a woman of God, is irritated with her neighbors for parking their cars legally on the street.

"How you doing, Mom?" says Sandy, gesturing at Darcy's stomach.

Darcy is seven months pregnant. We're checking COVID-19 numbers hourly. Our state of mind isn't what you'd call relaxed. Still, there's something momentous about a midday sojourn with our son's adult friend, who is as chatty and warm as she is enigmatic.

We've suddenly passed through the hole in the fence; we have to learn to breathe the air.

Darcy lightly rubs her belly. "Getting there, all right," she says.

A month later, Sandy leaves for good. We never expected this to happen. In regretful, low tones, we say these very words, "I never expected her to leave!" as though if we say it enough, she won't leave and our son won't be heartbroken, robbed of her magic.

From the nun whom Sandy sends to the hole in the fence to break the news to us, we learn that Sandy has left suddenly to care for her mother in Kansas. The other nun says that Sandy looked for Sebastian to say goodbye but couldn't find him in time.

Sandy left behind another box of presents: a coloring book, sidewalk chalk, the missing orange segment in the Hot Wheels track. When I look at Sebastian, he's looking down at his shoes.

Our second son is born in the spring. The baby is healthy, and in two days, he and Darcy are home. Sebastian adores his brother, but inevitably wanders down to the fence. Instead of calling "Sandy!" he cries, "Hello! Helloooooo!"

Sometimes the nun who broke the news about Sandy comes for desultory chats. Once, she slides a piece of paper under the fence with Sandy's address on it.

Surprising my wife and me, they write. They are proper pen pals: They write frequently, warmly. Sebastian writes of a summer indoors. He writes to "tell her that he loves her." Sandy writes of her new life in Kansas.

"God loves you, Sebastian," she signs every postcard. **R**



A Massive Moniker

My middle name is War-and-Peace. It's a long story.

 @JIMMERTHATISALL





INSPIRATION

A MAJOR LEAGUER'S SECOND CHANCE AT

LIFE

*A suicide attempt nearly ended
Drew Robinson's story. Now he is adding
the most remarkable chapters yet.*

BY *Jeff Passan*

FROM ESPN



On April 16, 2020, Drew Robinson woke up, sat at his kitchen table, and finished writing a note that would explain to his family and friends why he had decided to end his life.

“I hope you guys realize that no one could’ve seen this coming to prevent it, because of how hard I tried to hide it,” he wrote. “It’s no one’s fault.”

He apologized to Daiana, Darryl, Renee, Britney, and Chad—the five people he loved the most. The ones who knew him best and still couldn’t see the sadness suffocating him. Even they believed the avatar he had created: a Major League Baseball player, handsome, charming, funny, with an easy laugh and a big smile. At 27, Drew was living his dream and yet wanting to die.

At about 8 p.m., while sitting on his couch, he lifted his handgun, pressed it against his right temple, and pulled the trigger.

That was supposed to be the end of Drew Robinson’s story. But over the next 20 hours, he would come to realize it was the beginning of another.

IT’S SIX DAYS before Christmas 2020. Drew is feeling thankful. He wants to tell the world what happened—so he can heal, and maybe help others heal too.

He knows there are a million questions. How did he live for nearly an entire day with a giant hole on the right side of his head, with no medical attention? Few people survive self-inflicted gunshot wounds to the head. Even rarer are those who emerge with clarity, purpose.

More than anything, Drew wants to tell his story to help others recognize the awfulness of suicide. He didn’t need his family to see what they saw, to go through what they went through, to spend every day wondering whether he’s really OK, whether he’s going to do it again. The pain of a suicide—or attempted suicide—is not limited to one person.

“How can I go through this and not try to help other people?” Drew says. “This was a huge, painful sign that I’m supposed to help people get through something that they don’t think is winnable.”

Drew is convinced that he’s meant to do something. That much was clear when he opened his eyes and realized he was still alive.

MOMENTS AFTER SHOOTING himself, Drew looked around, confused, and thought, What happened? Why am I still here? He saw blood everywhere. He held his head, trying to stem the

bleeding. It didn't help. He decided to shower. When he stepped in, disorientation hit. He slipped and smacked his head on the handle, square on the entry wound. It still didn't hurt.

He dried off, then collapsed on his bed. The blood in his mouth turned his stomach, so he returned to the bathroom. As he bent over the toilet, his head struck the porcelain. He peeled himself up and tried to brush his teeth. How ridiculous, he thought. A guy with a hole in his head brushing his teeth.

It was around midnight, four hours after he pulled the trigger. As Drew collapsed onto his bed again and closed his eyes, he thought, This is where I'm going to die.

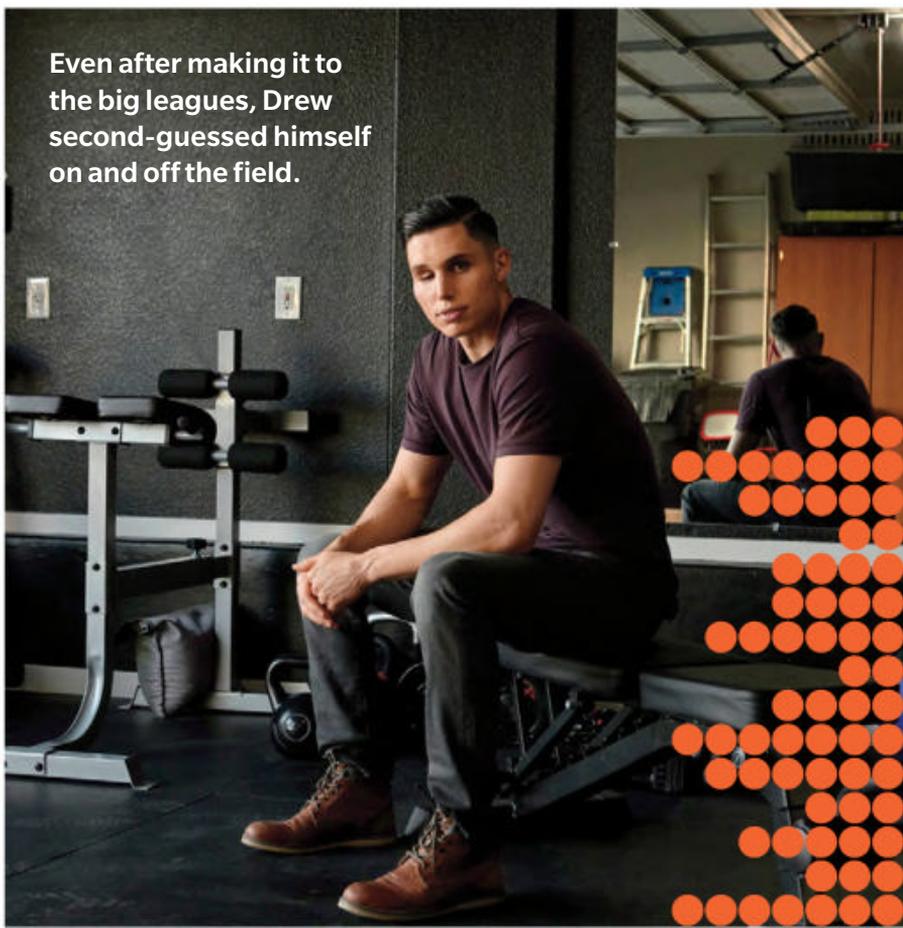
DREW ROBINSON GREW up on the outskirts of Las Vegas. He was Renee and Darryl Robinson's youngest child. His sister, Britney, and brother, Chad, found him a tagalong and an annoyance, the archetypal little brother who just wanted attention and love.

When Renee and Darryl divorced, the Robinson family splintered. The boys went to live with

Darryl. Britney stayed with Renee. They found common ground in one place: the baseball field. Chad grew to six foot five and was considered one of the best Major League Baseball (MLB) draft prospects in the country. Drew was undersized but skilled, smooth, natural. Almost every weekend, the Robinsons gathered at a baseball tournament, the parents putting aside any animus to support the boys.

Chad, who was drafted by the Milwaukee Brewers in 2006, set a near-impossible standard, and Drew considered anything short of it a failure. He craved perfection. He made varsity at Silverado High School as a freshman, hit a growth spurt before his junior year, and turned into a

Even after making it to the big leagues, Drew second-guessed himself on and off the field.





Drew is only the second man ever to play in the major leagues after losing an eye.

act cool. But neither Daiana nor the world could see Drew how he saw himself—not as the jokester but as the joke.

Drew would talk to himself as if he had an ever-present companion who shared in his misery.

“When something would go wrong,” Drew says, “the voice in my head would answer, Well, of course. That’s just how your life goes. You don’t get to enjoy things.”

Over his last two high school seasons, Drew was one of the best players in the

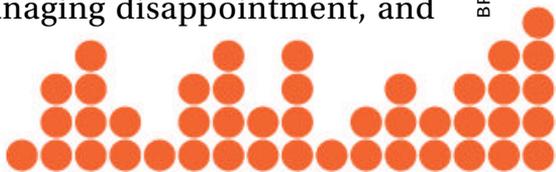
prospect: six foot one with a powerful swing and the ability to play shortstop and the outfield—the best player at Silverado since his brother.

He was popular, especially with the girls. Drew went from one to the next until he met Daiana Anguelova. For Daiana, there was something magnetic about Drew, even if it wasn’t an obvious match. He could be loud, bombastic, always trying to look and

historic Vegas-area Class of 2010 that included Bryce Harper, the first pick in the MLB draft. The Texas Rangers chose Drew in the fourth round with the 136th pick. He received a \$198,000 signing bonus.

At 18, Drew was a professional baseball player. This accelerated adulthood for him; Drew was not only paying bills, but also navigating politics, managing disappointment, and

BRIDGET BENNETT



figuring out how to live in a universe designed to weed out the weak.

Drew's brother already lived this reality. The 4:30 a.m. wake-up calls for workouts. The long bus rides. The arm surgeries. Had Drew and Chad spoken more, Drew would have known how pro ball worked—how its physical elements paled in comparison to its mental toll. But talking wasn't their thing. Drew would have to navigate the harsh learning curve on his own, including years of struggling to ascend through the ranks of the minor leagues.

Baseball exposed cracks in his facade of stability. His adoration for the game vacillated. He loved baseball one day and loathed it the next.

"I DID IT." That was the text Drew sent his family after being told he had made the Rangers' opening day roster in 2017. This was the dream.

Drew got two at-bats in the Rangers' third game. Seven days later, he was demoted to Triple-A. The big leagues can be cruel this way.

He returned to the majors on May 28 and was sent back down on the 29th. He got called up again on June 24, hammered a home run for his first major league hit on the 25th, and was demoted on the 26th. The Rangers summoned him again on July 7, and he remained with the team for the rest of the season.

Finally, he was a big leaguer. Although Drew acted as if he belonged,

he still felt otherwise. In the clubhouse, he questioned every answer he gave to reporters. On the field, he second-guessed minutiae—how he stood during the national anthem, how he looked running to his position between innings.

In December 2018, the Rangers traded Drew to the St. Louis Cardinals. He decided this would be a fresh start. He proposed to Daiana. She said yes and they set a wedding date.

A QUESTION BREWED IN HIS MIND: WHO WOULD CARE IF I'M GONE? HE COULDN'T ANSWER.



Drew made the Cardinals' big league roster out of spring training, but a week into the season, he was sent down to Triple-A. He returned on March 31, played three games, then was sent back down. He returned on April 15 and was demoted again the next day. Up April 22, down April 23. He hurt his non-throwing left elbow and needed surgery. On August 28, 2019, the Cardinals released him.

The companion's voice grew louder, and Drew grew more depressed. He knew that he needed help, so he started to see a therapist and read self-development books. He wanted to see himself the way he believed everyone else saw themselves.

The San Francisco Giants signed

Drew to a nonguaranteed minor league contract on January 6, 2020. He worried he was destined to end up in the minors again. He worried that he wasn't good enough for Daiana, and that he never would be. Drew called off the wedding.

A question brewed in his mind: Who would care if I'm gone? When he couldn't answer, he started to plan his death.

HE STOPPED IN THE BATHROOM AND LOOKED AT HIS FACE. IT WAS UNRECOGNIZABLE.



On March 12, 2020, COVID-19 shut down baseball. Drew returned to his empty house in Las Vegas. A week later, he went to a gun store to purchase a weapon.

AT 7 A.M. on April 17, Drew woke up, and the pain finally hit. When he moved, pieces of his face shifted. He considered getting the gun and trying again. For hours, he slipped in and out of consciousness.

The pain worsened. He tried to sit up but collapsed onto the floor. He was thirsty. He mustered the strength to stand. He lurched into the kitchen,

Drew in training. He began playing baseball again just months after trying to take his own life.

filled a cup with water and, to help with the pain, swallowed a Tylenol.

Walking back to his room, he stopped in the bathroom and looked at his face. It was unrecognizable. The bullet had mangled his right eye.

He thought about baseball, whether anyone could play with one eye. He wondered if thinking about the future meant he was trying to survive. That Tylenol—was it some subconscious sign that he wanted to heal?

Around 3:30 p.m., Drew was sitting in the same spot on the couch where he had shot himself. On his coffee table were his gun and his cell phone. He picked up the pistol with his left hand. He held the phone in his right hand. He punched in the numbers 9-1-1. He could pull the trigger. Or he could tap the green dial button.

It came to him, he says, in an instant. I want to live, Drew told himself. He called 9-1-1. "I need an ambulance," he said. "I tried to



commit suicide last night, and I made it through. I have a huge hole in my head and I'm in a lot of pain."

Police rushed to his house. At 3:57 p.m., Drew was loaded into an ambulance for transport to University Medical Center Trauma Center in Las Vegas.

A 9 MILLIMETER bullet exits a handgun traveling upwards of 750 mph. When the bullet entered Drew's head, it almost immediately ruptured his right eyeball. It also fractured his frontal sinus, causing the leakage of cerebrospinal fluid, which poses significant infection risk. The bullet whistled past his left orbital floor and out above his left cheekbone, millimeters from ruining his other eye.

Doctors worked wonders putting Drew back together physically. The first surgery was to save his right eyelid. The second replaced the shattered bones around it. The procedure

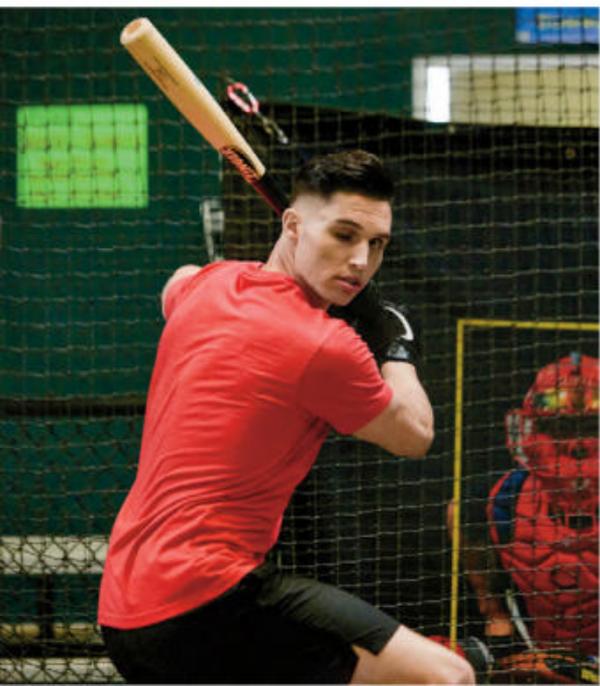
took about two hours and returned most of the symmetry to his face. The third was to fix the fracture in his sinus and stem the leakage of cerebrospinal fluid.

Drew's right eye was beyond repair. The bullet shredded its insides and severed the optic nerve. On June 11, UMC Trauma scheduled a fourth surgery, an enucleation—the removal of Drew's eye. The eye globe was replaced with an implant, which left room in front for a prosthetic eye.

Hitting major league pitches, even with two working eyes, is extraordinarily difficult. Doing so with one—and the rear eye at that—is next to impossible. Only one man has lost an eye and played in the major leagues: Whammy Douglas, who pitched 47 innings for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1957.

Drew began playing baseball again that July, just 14 weeks after trying to take his own life. He progressed from

BRIDGET BENNETT (3)



batting off a tee indoors to fending off live pitches in a stadium. On October 21, 2020, a ball left his bat and went hissing toward right-center field at Las Vegas Ballpark, the Triple-A stadium where local pros go for offseason hitting sessions. None of his previous 30 or so swings had yielded a home run, but this ball snuck over the fence.

Drew took a slight skip and jogged to first base. He stopped there. He'd save the full trot for a game—on the off chance that someone might offer him a chance to play again.

DREW REMAINED IN touch with the Giants after getting out of the hospital. In late summer, he asked whether he could speak to the organization's players and staff in recognition of World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10. Drew figured that if he was going to help others, telling his story would be the most impactful way to do it. The Giants welcomed the idea.

Drew arrived at Oracle Park on September 9. He was nervous. The players, coaches, and other staff gathered around him. He grabbed the microphone.

"First, I just want to say thank you for everything," Drew said. "What I've been through the last couple of months has been the most powerful experience."

Drew took a deep breath before he continued.

"April 16, around 8 p.m., I shot myself in the head. A day later, I dialed



Top: Drew throws the ceremonial first pitch at Wrigley Field in Chicago on September 10, 2021. **Bottom:** With his dog, Ellie.

9-1-1. That night, not only was my life saved, but it was restarted."

Drew spoke for seven minutes. He covered the importance of talking about mental health, the need for support from others, and his intention to give baseball another shot. He

saw people crying. Drew left San Francisco that day feeling content: If this was the last thing he ever did with the Giants, he felt good about it.

ON OCTOBER 22, the day after he hit the home run, Drew panicked. He saw he had missed a text from Giants manager Gabe Kapler. “You awake?” it read.

Drew called back. When they spoke, Gabe told Drew that the organization cared about him. They wanted people like him around. And they believed he could still play major league baseball.

The Giants offered Drew a contract with an invitation to minor league spring training. He wouldn’t be in the same clubhouse as the big league players. There wouldn’t be any guaranteed money or a roster spot. But he would get the chance to work his way there.

Drew couldn’t thank Gabe enough. He was going to play baseball again.

FOLLOWING A SUCCESSFUL spring training, Drew started for the Sacramento River Cats in their first game of the season on May 6, 2021, against the Las Vegas Aviators. Playing once again in the same city where he was born and raised—and where he almost died—Drew struggled. He struck out in each of his four at-bats. But the crowd still acknowledged him with vociferous cheers, marveling at his remarkable comeback.

Then, in his fourth game back, and

still in Las Vegas, Drew’s bat made contact. The ball soared high and far, and landed over the back wall. He had hit a home run, the first of three he would go on to hit last year.

But midseason, Drew decided to retire—from playing, not from the game itself. Amid his on-field struggles, Drew discussed and ultimately took a job with the Giants’ front office as a mental health advocate. He wrote on Instagram: “For the Giants to believe I can help other players address their emotional well-being is truly humbling.” Drew ended his post with gratitude, saying to his friends, family, teammates, and, “most importantly, to Daiana, my everything. I thank you.”

IN THE DRAWER of Drew’s nightstand lies a small box. Inside is the bullet that burrowed through his head and changed his life. Sometimes he’ll remove it, roll it between his index finger and thumb, and remind himself where he was then and where he is now.

“I look at this thing and think, I’m stronger than you,” he says. “I’m stronger than I thought I was.” 

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide or is in emotional distress, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK(8255) or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

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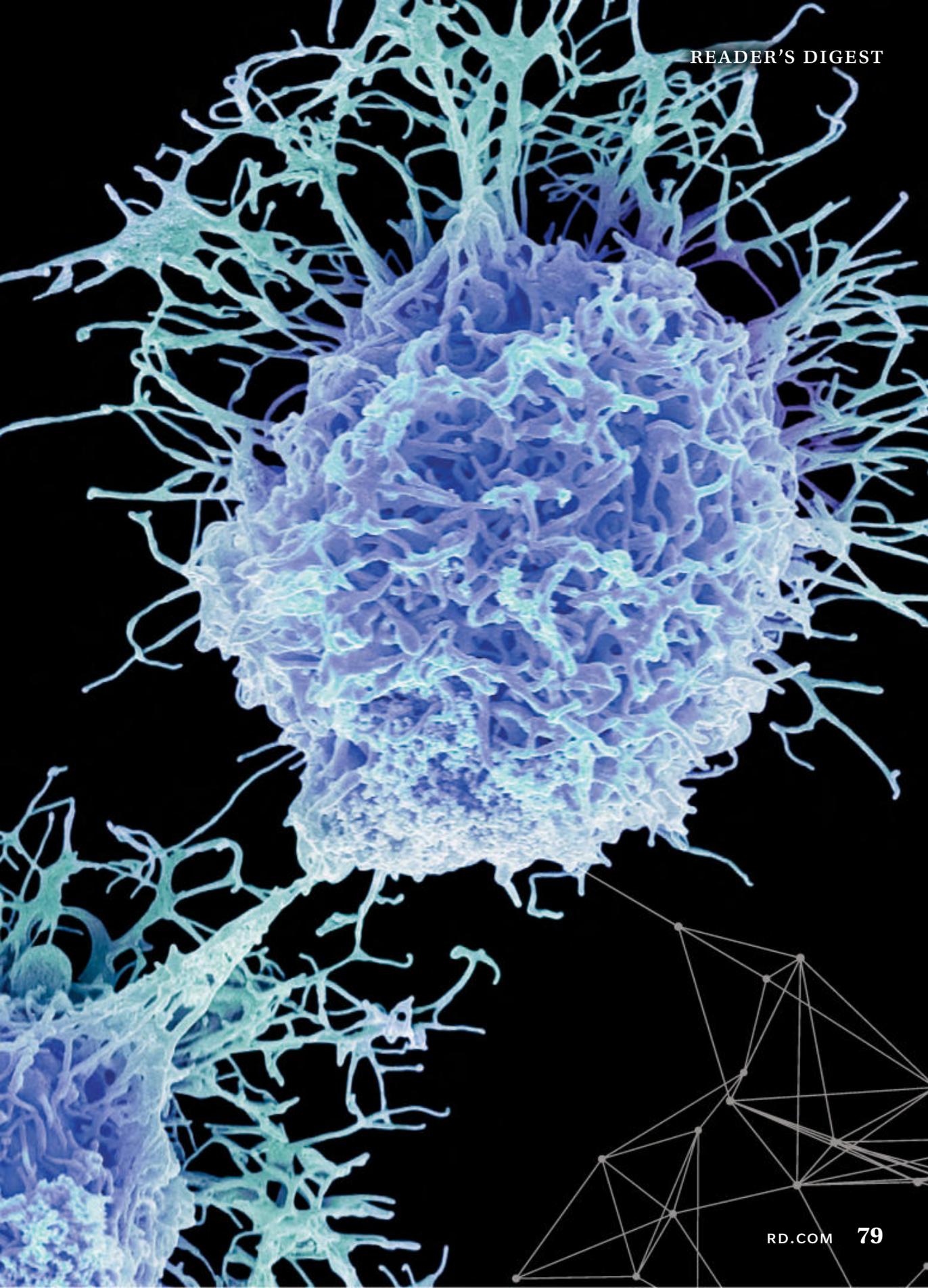


HEALTH

HOW OUR OWN CELLS CAN HEAL US

*Breakthrough treatments in
what's called regenerative medicine
can be a lifesaver.*

BY Patricia Pearson





A

ANNISSA JOBB first limped into the office of Riam Shammaa, MD, a sports medicine doctor and pain specialist in Toronto, in 2017. Jobb had been working as an aide in long-term care facilities when her back pain first appeared about a decade earlier. The cause: an undiagnosed herniated disc, which had pinched a nerve. As the pain worsened, Jobb gritted her teeth and tried to keep going. Now she was desperate for help.

“It’s been my calling in life, taking care of people,” says Jobb, now 55. But working with frail seniors involves a lot of lifting, bending, and pulling. “I had a drawer full of pain medication. None of it was working. I’d snap,” she says. “My husband and I came close to getting divorced.”

By November 2016, Jobb could scarcely walk even a short distance. “My doctor finally said, ‘You will end up in a wheelchair if you don’t stop working there.’”

Jobb’s internist referred her to Dr. Shammaa, who began by administering nerve-block injections, similar to an epidural, every few weeks. They

held the pain at bay for anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, but then it always returned.

Historically, the treatment of chronic back pain has been less than ideal, sometimes causing patients to become addicted to opioids or to undergo major—often unsuccessful—spinal-fusion surgery, which is suitable for only about 1 in 20 patients. Hunting for a solution beyond these limited options, Dr. Shammaa turned to stem cells—the building-block cells found not just in embryos, but also in various tissues in adult bodies—which can generate an array of different cells. Specifically, he’d been studying bone marrow stem cells, and he invited Jobb to participate in a study with 23 other patients, cautioning that there were no guarantees. The procedure would use Jobb’s own bone marrow, and it had been proved safe. The hope is that injecting the stem cells, known as mesenchymal stem cells, or MSCs, into the patient’s herniated disc will regenerate and heal the damaged tissue.

An MRI of Jobb’s spine showed that two discs were causing her problem, which was good news as far as the procedure was concerned. “Out of five levels on the lumbar spine, one or two showing damage tells you that the spine hasn’t deteriorated everywhere,” says Dr. Shammaa. “By contrast, when you have five levels of disc disease—in other words, the spine is really messed up—there is not a lot you can do.”



Dr. Riam Shammaa used Annissa Jobb's stem cells to alleviate her back pain.

The procedure took three and a half hours. It began with the extraction of Jobb's bone marrow—the most painful step—which was immediately distilled and concentrated into bone marrow aspirate concentrate, or BMAC, then injected into the discs. Guided by a type of X-ray called fluoroscopy, Dr. Shammaa inserted a needle through Jobb's spine to place the BMAC into the discs. Jobb remained awake for the entire procedure in order to alert Dr. Shammaa if he touched a nerve.

Afterward, Jobb recovered in bed for two weeks and then, slowly, began to walk. A month later she strode briskly into the clinic, a moment Dr. Shammaa recalls with delight. Whereas Jobb had previously described her

pain as “beyond ten,” she says that it's now a two.

When Dr. Shammaa published his findings in the March 2021 issue of the medical journal *Frontiers in Medicine*, he reported that 90 percent of his patients gained two to three millimeters of height that had been lost due to disc compression. And 80 percent of them stopped using opioids.

The use of stem cells is part of a field called regenerative medicine, which emerged two decades ago as a way to deploy the body's own cells to repair tissues by restoring their lost function. Several such therapies have already been approved by regulatory agencies around the world. The FDA

has approved stem-cell treatments for certain cancers, blood disorders, and immune disorders, but many more are in use, including skin substitutes for treating burns and healing surgical incisions. As researchers report from clinical trials all over the world, the hope is that stem cells will revolutionize the treatment of many conditions over the next decade.

For instance, in a study treating congenital vision loss with retinal stem cells at the University of California, Irvine, one woman was able to see her family clearly for the first



PATIENTS PARALYZED BY SPINAL CORD INJURIES REGAINED SOME UPPER-BODY MOVEMENT.

time in years. A German child suffering from a sometimes-fatal skin disease called epidermolysis bullosa recovered after receiving a transplant of genetically modified skin cells at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia in Italy. The actor Selma Blair reported last August that she was in symptom remission after participating in a stem-cell transplant trial for multiple sclerosis. And a study on treating osteoarthritis underway in Ireland, France, and the Netherlands shows promising initial results.

Despite these early successes, Dr. Shammaa cautions that the science is so new that it is easily misunderstood and misapplied. “There are a lot of snake-oil salesmen out there,” he says, pointing to private stem-cell clinics all over the world that claim to cure such things as erectile dysfunction or dementia, without genuine evidence and in defiance of regulatory bodies. “It’s important for patients to learn what is possible right now and what is still down the road.”

In the future, says Shane Shapiro, MD, assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, “we’re looking at regenerative medicine as something that will one day be a medical specialty of its own, much like cardiology or neurology.”

An early breakthrough occurred in 2006, when Shinya Yamanaka, MD, a molecular biologist at Kyoto University in Japan, showed that stem-cell therapy could avoid the morally divisive use of embryonic stem cells. Instead, he discovered he could induce adult skin cells to develop into blood, bone, or liver cells. Dr. Yamanaka, who went on to win the Nobel Prize in 2012 for this work, differentiated these cells from the kind found in a fertilized egg, calling them “induced pluripotent stem cells,” or iPSCs. While an embryo’s cells could turn into any part of the body, iPSCs could create many

different types of tissues, but not all. This discovery moved the stem-cell conversation past the sensitive subject of using fetal tissue for medical purposes, which is illegal in some countries, and the research began to take off.

In 2014, Tokyo's Riken research institute performed the first successful iPSC transplant, creating retinal cells generated from skin cells of a patient with age-related macular degeneration, a serious eye condition. Shortly afterward, Henry Klassen, MD, at the University of California, Irvine, oversaw a trial for treating retinitis pigmentosa, a group of rare genetic disorders causing gradual blindness, in which a donor's retinal progenitor cells were transplanted

into the eyes of 28 study participants.

One of them, Kristin Macdonald of Los Angeles, who had gone blind, regained what she describes as a burst of light. "I can navigate by light now, and see more contrasts and shapes," says Macdonald, now 65. She has since become an outspoken patient advocate for stem-cell trials.

Then, in 2018, neurosurgeon Richard Fessler, MD, of Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, oversaw a yearlong trial with iPSC-derived motor neurons transplanted into six patients paralyzed by spinal cord injuries. Dr. Fessler reported that all regained some upper-body movement and that a patient who was able to only shrug his shoulders could now eat, write, and do other tasks with his hands.



A regenerative medicine scientist examines a stem-cell culture.

This is the kind of breakthrough that the late actor Christopher Reeve, best known for playing Superman, was advocating for from his wheelchair after suffering neck-down paralysis following a horseback-riding accident in 1995.

At that time, governments around the world were making moves to restrict embryonic stem-cell research. (In certain cases, embryonic stem cells are in medical use today; they're derived from leftover blastocysts—the clustering of cells in a fertilized egg—that didn't implant during IVF treatment.)

“I CAN DO ALMOST EVERYTHING THAT I DID BEFORE,” SAYS A MAN WHO GOT RELIEF FROM KNEE PAIN.

These are still early days, with much to investigate in terms of safety and dosing, not to mention the question of how to manufacture iPSCs for different conditions. But Dr. Yamanaka predicted in 2018 that several treatments using regenerative medicine and new drugs would be developed, authorized, and covered by insurance as soon as 2030.

In the meantime, the first generation of stem-cell treatments that have regulatory approval in the United

States as well as in Canada and Europe largely involve simple cell transplants—ones that move the patient's own cells from one part of the body to another, such as the procedure Dr. Shammaa performed on Annissa Jobb. That said, stem-cell transplants for blood diseases such as leukemia, which have been carried out for several years, are the one exception where cells from a matching donor are also allowed.

Among approved procedures, the most common is the transfer of BMAC to the spine or the knee. While Jobb sought treatment for her back pain, Rodolfo Corsini, now 58, was looking for relief for job-related knee pain when he visited Humanitas Research Hospital in Milan, Italy, in 2020. He hadn't heard of BMAC until it was suggested to him by a surgeon, Elizaveta Kon, MD, who didn't see enough damage to merit knee-replacement surgery. Corsini agreed to the injection, and it was a success. “I can do almost everything that I did before,” he says.

Dr. Kon, along with some European colleagues, is now involved in a number of exploratory studies, including a comparison of treating patients with BMAC and another type of adult stem cell—called stromal vascular fraction (SVF)—which is extracted from a person's fat tissue.

Will it work? Certainly the early research on BMAC provides hope, although with limitations. “We couch these treatments as something to help

with a chronic, degenerative condition, something that in many cases can be successful in managing the symptoms and improving quality of life, but in most cases are not a cure,” Dr. Shane Shapiro says. “The analogy should be diabetes or high cholesterol. We don’t cure those things; we treat them. What we would like to see in the future is a way to treat arthritis without metal and plastic, or to treat degenerative disc disease without a spinal fusion. That’s the ultimate goal.”

Researchers at ten European institutions are currently working together toward that goal, and also on a way to skip the painful bone marrow extraction procedure that Jobb underwent. Instead, says research scientist Mary Murphy at the National University of Ireland, Galway, they hope to create mesenchymal stem cells in the laboratory in a standardized, cost-effective, and high-volume way.

Because regenerative medicine is still young, patients should be wary of profit-hungry companies selling fraudulent stem-cell products as if they were magic potions to cure everything from hair loss to Lyme disease. Instead, consult with a medical expert on your specific condition to learn your options. “If it’s knee arthritis, start with a specialist in orthopedic surgery or sports medicine,” advises Dr. Shapiro. “If it’s degenerative disc disease of the lumbar spine, start with a spine specialist.” Then, seek a referral to someone in that field who has expertise in regenerative medicine.

For many patients, stem-cell therapy is already making a lasting difference to their quality of life. “My husband and I went hiking last summer,” Jobb says. “I walked a half-mile. I was so excited. I thought, maybe I could start cross-country skiing! Why not?” **R**



Turn Off These Turns of Phrase

Lake Superior State University compiles an annual list of phrases that should be banished “for misuse, overuse, and uselessness.” Among the latest offenders:

No worries

Circle back

Deep dive

New normal

You’re on mute

LSSU.EDU



DRAMA IN REAL LIFE



DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT ME!

Staying in Kabul meant death for this Afghan journalist. A U.S. naval officer and a reporter were ready to help her flee the Taliban—if she could make it to the airplane.

BY *Fatema Hosseini* with
Kim Hjelmgard and
Kelley Benham French

FROM USA TODAY





THE DAY KABUL FELL

FATEMA HOSSEINI: It seems impossible that civilization can be knocked back a few decades in an afternoon, that life as you know it can collapse before lunch, but it did.

Sunday morning, August 15, 2021, began like most any other day. I picked up warm naan from the bakery and headed to the office in my usual jeans, dress, scarf, and sneakers. The streets were crowded. Hundreds of vendors spilled into the road hawking vegetables and fruits over loudspeakers: “Apple! Melon! Mango!” I weaved through their carts among women in colorful dresses. Kabul must be one of the loudest cities on earth.

I passed my favorite restaurant, Taj Begum, always brimming with hookah mist and laughter. It is named for an Afghan warrior princess and owned by the fiercest woman in Kabul. She drives through the streets

shouting at the other drivers, nearly all of them men.

In the office of the Etilaat-e-Roz news agency where I work, phones were ringing as the Taliban advanced toward Kabul, on the cusp of taking over the government.

My mother called me, crying. “Put on your long dress. The Taliban are everywhere.” She, my father, my brother, and my baby sister were staying in my small apartment after the Taliban had ransacked their home in Herat. She was now scared for me. I should have been, too. I was 27, a bad Muslim, as far as the Taliban might be concerned: an educated single woman who asked too many questions and rarely wore a hijab, a veil that covers the hair, neck, and shoulders. I was a working journalist,

**To a Taliban fighter,
silencing my voice would
be a golden step on the
stairway to paradise.**

a member of the oppressed Shi'a Hazara ethnic group, daughter of an Afghan national soldier. To a Taliban fighter heady with new power, silencing my voice would be a golden step on the stairway to paradise.

“Mom, it's OK. My dress is not that short!”

She started shouting. “You're not listening to me!”



Fatema, having fun with friends—something the Taliban did not want to see

What I didn't know then was that the Taliban had already breached the presidential palace.

Early in the afternoon, I decided to go home, but my colleague said I couldn't walk home without a male escort. That's when I knew it was real.

I took a cab most of the way. The shops, bustling just that morning, were closed and the streets nearly empty. At Taj Begum, the owner had locked the door and smashed all the hookahs, because the Taliban didn't approve of them. A truck loaded with Taliban flew by.

As I entered my apartment, I realized that all the evidence the Taliban would need of my infidel status was just inside the front door. I'd covered the wall with photos of my friends and

me doing normal things: eating ice cream, laughing, wearing silly glasses. My hair spills out around my face. My lipstick is a happy shade of cherry.

The Taliban don't want to see my face. They don't want to see me with friends from the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh. My education and my work are threatening to their ideology. A wisp of hair showing around my face is an affront to God.

I snatched the photos and dropped them into a bucket. I lit a match. The room filled with smoke.

KIM HJELMGAARD: I'm a London-based international correspondent for *USA Today*. Fatema, in addition to her work at Etilaat-e-Roz, was a freelance reporter for *USA Today*. Her hashtags

on Twitter alone were enough to get her killed: #TalibanGotoHell, #TalibanTerrorists, #TalibanNeverChange.

I contacted Fatema around noon London time that Sunday. "I hope you are OK," I wrote in a WhatsApp message. "Tell me how I can help."

"I will never become a Taliban wife," I replied. "I would rather die."

She e-mailed me her passport information, her national ID card, and a visa application she'd texted to the U.S. State Department. The only secure way out of Kabul was the Hamid Karzai International Airport. Land routes out of Afghanistan were clogged and dangerous.

I had one more question. "Would you be prepared to go without your family?"

She wrote back. "I think so."

The next day, Monday, August 16, I rose early and started messaging anyone I could think of with connections to Afghanistan. Contacts in the U.S. military and members of Congress. European diplomats, aid workers, and journalists, including *USA Today* editors, who started calling contacts as well.

Then a U.S. Navy Reserve public affairs officer responded to one of my messages.

"Hi Alex, asking for a real favor here," I'd texted along with some details.

"Absolutely," he replied, adding, "It's going to be tough." The airport was already crowded and spinning out of control. He promised nothing, but it felt like progress.

I'd met Lt. Alex Cornell du Houx, 38, two years earlier aboard a U.S. Navy destroyer patrolling the Persian Gulf. He had served twice in the Maine House of Representatives and had a civilian job addressing climate change. Within a few hours, he had an update. "An interesting option from a friend in the Ukraine gov. They have a flight with extra seats," he messaged. I wrote back thanking him, thinking, "We're almost there." Fatema would go to the airport, the Ukrainians would get her through the gate, she'd get on the plane, and we'd work out later how to get her to the U.S.

My First Attempt to Flee

FATEMA: On Tuesday, I got a message from Ukraine's special forces to head to the airport, but once near, I was called off. Go home and wait for word, they told me.

That night, I ran into a married policewoman who lived in my building.

"What is your plan?" she asked me.

I shrugged, unsure how much to reveal. "Well, you'd better make one," she said, "because the Taliban have already started forcing young girls and widows to marry them. They will find you and marry you off."

Fatema's outfit let her blend in at the airport and hide important documents.



“I will never become a Taliban wife,” I replied. “I would rather die.”

I Wait

FATEMA: The next morning, I found my mom sitting on the floor of my apartment cutting up documents that told the story of our family's achievements. My dad's ID cards, photos in his army uniform. My sister's certificates for courses in computers. My brother's certificates from English classes. If they were written in English, they identified us as people who might have worked with foreigners.

I'd kept a memory notebook since 2009. Inside were my drawings and poems in Farsi and English. My friends signed it each year. “I have a feeling you will be someone powerful someday,” one friend wrote in 2014.

I gave it to my mom. “I don't have the heart to burn it,” I said. “Maybe you can.”

KIM: Alex Cornell du Houx was working with a friend, Iryna Andruk, 33, a colonel in Ukraine's military, to get Fatema on a Ukrainian air force jet to Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. Alex sent instructions to Fatema by WhatsApp.

Ivan [not his real name], a Ukrainian special forces soldier, was assigned to find Fatema at the airport and get her through the gate.

Saying Goodbye

FATEMA: On Thursday, my mother woke me at 4 a.m. She sewed a pouch into my scarf and placed my university diploma in it. It was the one certificate she couldn't bear to cut



Fatema and her mother, Masuma, a year before Fatema's escape

up. When I was younger, she'd taken out loans to send me to the top high school in Afghanistan. My relatives and neighbors would say, "She's just a girl. Investing at this level will be useless to her." Instead I became a journalist investigating corruption and giving voice to women.

I tied the scarf across my back. She sewed another scarf into a belt that held my passport and a hard drive containing some of my work. Over that I put on a sleeveless dress and a jean jacket. I then put on a long chador (a shawl covering my head and upper body, leaving room for just my face) that belonged to my mother.

I had no idea if I would see my family again. I tried not to cry.

My brother and brother-in-law came with me, because I needed a male escort now any time I left the house. Traffic grew intense as we neared the

airport. The area was swarming with Taliban fighters searching cars and turning people away.

KIM: Fatema's messages were distressing. At each of the half dozen airport entrances, the Taliban had erected checkpoints that travelers had to pass before they could reach barricades controlled by U.S. and NATO forces. The Taliban appeared to have lists of people they did not want to let leave Afghanistan. Once at the airport, Fatema would have to walk past two gates until she'd reach the East Gate, where we hoped the Ukrainians would be looking for her.

An Impossible Struggle

FATEMA: I got out of the taxi and right away lost my brother, who had my suitcase, in the crowd. A militant chased him, and he was gone. My brother-in-law had gone back home.

When I reached the first checkpoint, I faced a huge crowd—men lined up on one side, women on the other—and fought my way through. At the front, two militants were lashing people with whips and firing bullets into the air.

"My brother! My brother is there, let me pass!" I shouted in Farsi.

Two militants controlled the line. One of them angrily shoved me back, cursing me. For some reason, I couldn't take my eyes off his crazy, tired eyes lined with dark kohl, which made him furious.

"You're shameless!" he shouted.

“Look down if you talk to me!” He shoved me with the butt of his rifle. He raised his arm to whip me, but his colleague stopped him. The colleague looked at me and said, “This is your only chance.”

I ran through the checkpoint, leaving them arguing. I made it to the second checkpoint, where NATO troops were standing on the wall. A Taliban militant was speaking, but I didn’t understand his language. I pushed forward and saw him raise his whip. I dodged it and it hit the woman behind me on her shoulder. I heard her crying. I couldn’t move, so I just sat, right in front of the soldier.

“Can you let me pass?” I asked in Farsi.

“Where do you want to go?”

“The other side. My brother is there,” I lied. “I want to take him back home.”

I must have looked so pale and thirsty. My voice was stuck in my dry throat. “Just let me go.”

Lost and Desperate

FATEMA: Alex Cornell du Houx had told me to stay by the East Gate so Ivan could find me. I saw people who had been waiting here night after night with no food or water. They wore days of dust on their faces. Mothers were crying.

My phone rang and Ivan said, “Go to North Gate.” He hung up before I could answer.

I felt hopeless. I had been told that

the plane would leave at 1 p.m., and it was past 12:30.

“Where is the North Gate?” I kept asking people.

A man told me to follow the canal around the far edge of the airport, then get a taxi to the North Gate, which was a half-hour away. I blindly did what he said.

A Talib emptied his gun next to my ear. I went deaf. A woman beside me was hit by bullets.

I reached a crowded area and climbed into a taxi. After 20 minutes, the cab stopped, and the driver pointed out the airport’s North Gate, ten minutes away by foot. It was past 1 p.m., and I was still on the wrong side of a Taliban checkpoint.

At the checkpoint, people were sitting because the Taliban had warned that if anyone stood they would be shot. Men and women were crowded together. I was duckwalking to stay low. I had to keep moving forward.

Then a tear-gas canister landed in front of me. People started running and pushing. With tears streaming from my eyes, I stood and shouted, “I want to get out!”

A Talib inches away emptied his gun next to my ear. I went deaf. A woman beside me was hit by bullets. The Talib pushed me hard, and I stumbled out

of the crowd. Everything went black.

I woke up by the roadside soon after. Someone was giving me water. "It's salty," he said. I drank it all.

I'd had it. I texted Kim Hjelmgaard to tell him that it was over and that I was going home: "I can't. I will die. They open fire. And throw tear gas."

Then Alex reached out. "Pls pause and think of something you love."

"You don't need to beat people up, you don't need to kill them. These are our people."

So I did. Dancing in my bedroom to Bollywood songs and singing so loud I forget myself. My baby sister Mobina's laugh. The courage I feel in the morning when I leave the house looking the way I want. My favorite passage from *Azadi*, a book about India (the title means "freedom"): "What we need are people who ... are prepared to put themselves in danger. Who are prepared to tell the truth. Brave journalists can do that, and they have ... We have work to do. And a world to win."

I could try to go home but had nothing to go back to. The Taliban would beat me or kill me or own me. I stayed.

Hope

FATEMA: My phone rang. It was Ivan, directing me to meet up with a guy nearby who he said would help me.

After a few minutes of searching, I found him. He took me to a place where many Ukrainian families were waiting to get through the gate. I saw the Ukrainian flag rise from the other side.

As we approached a wire fence, a Taliban soldier tried to push me back. I looked at him directly, a man about my age. The words poured out before I could stop them. "God, you are so violent. You don't need to beat people up, you don't need to kill them. These are our people."

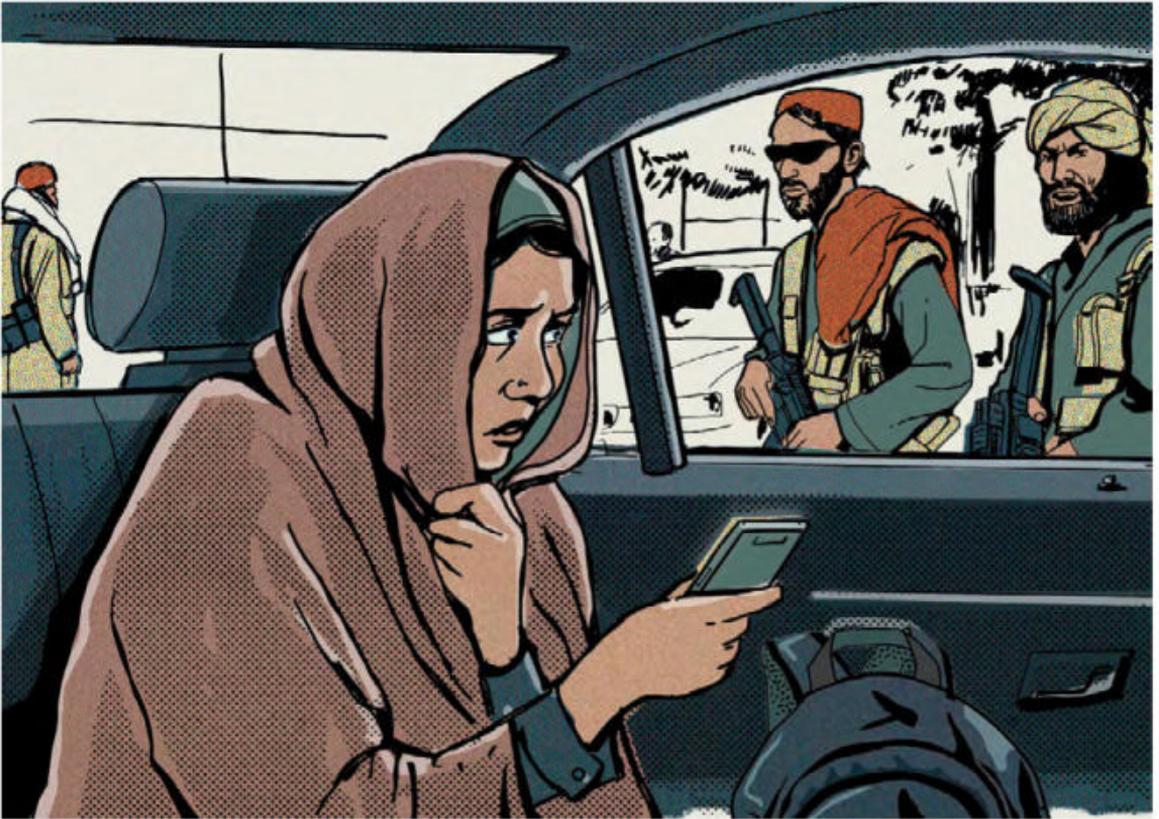
He shoved me. But all my fear was gone. "Look at those troops on the other side," I told him. "They are waiting for me and watching us now. If you beat me up, they will come after you."

He let me closer to the fence, where I stood as tall as I could, lifted my hands to the sky, and screamed, "Ivan! Ivan! It's Fatema! It's Fatema!"

He was standing right in front of me on the other side of the fence, and sent one of his troops outside to get me. This soldier half carried me, half dragged me, and I stepped over God knows how many others who were waiting on the way through the gate.

Freedom

FATEMA: Ukraine's air force plane stayed in Kabul two more days as the special forces tried to rescue more people. Finally, at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, August 22, I landed in Kyiv. Iryna Andruk, the Ukrainian



colonel, sent a photo of the two of us, all wide smiles and blessed relief, to Kim Hjelmgard.

As for Alex Cornell du Houx, I was the first Afghan he'd evacuate from Kabul. Afterward, he worked with Iryna and other contacts to rescue 500 more, among them my parents, my brother, and my baby sister.

After my family was safe in Ukraine, my mom and I talked about the things we had left behind. "My memory notebook," I said sadly, remembering that I'd asked her to burn it.

"I brought that," she said. She forgot my brother's underwear, but she saved my purest memories, the ones where I found my voice.

On September 11, I flew to Dulles International Airport outside Washington, DC, the very airport where, exactly 20 years earlier, a jet took off loaded with passengers, which terrorists hijacked to fly into the Pentagon.

Today, I continue to write about Afghanistan and the Taliban for a *USA Today* affiliate, Newsquest. Meanwhile, followers of Osama bin Laden and others are still in Pakistan and Afghanistan, organizing and recruiting. Women are covering under black cloth. We still have a world to win, and some part of that fight belongs to me. **R**

FATEMA HOSSEINI AND KIM HJELMGAARD WITH
KELLEY BENHAM FRENCH (SEPTEMBER 30, 2021),
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HOW TO

Clean the Things You Never Do*

More chores? Don't worry. Just add an item or two to your regular routine, and your home will thank you.

BY *Emily Goodman*
and *Jamie Novak*

*But Should

TMB STUDIO



TIP

Dust your electronics very lightly.

You routinely change your sheets, but when was the last time you refreshed your mattress?

And you run your dishwasher regularly, but how long has it been since you gave the machine itself a wash? Chances are, you haven't thought to clean certain household items in a long while—and might not think to clean them at all, until they become bigger projects than they would be if you'd given them a little regular TLC.

If you feel you already spend too much time cleaning, don't despair. Many of these tasks are easy to tackle, especially if you tack them on to existing chores.

We suggest routines for each, but these are simply standards to shoot for, not literal homework. To start, it's enough to notice these frequently overlooked items more often than you perhaps have before. The nicest part? As you build them into your cleaning routine, you won't have to pay much attention to them.

APPLIANCES

COFFEE MAKER

✳ **How to clean** Over time, the oils from all your cups of joe build up inside your coffee maker. To remove them, along with any lime scale, first check the manual (or manufacturer's website) to see whether either

advises against using any particular descaling agent. If not, mix one part white vinegar and nine parts water (or two parts lemon juice and eight parts water), fill the reservoir with the mixture, and run a drip cycle. Pause it halfway to let the solution sit for about half an hour to break down any buildup. Then finish the brewing cycle and run two more full cycles with plain water to remove any lingering traces of vinegar or lemon.

✳ **How often** When your machine starts to take an unusually long time to brew.

FAUCETS AND SHOWERHEADS

✳ **How to clean** Fill a plastic bag about halfway with white vinegar. (Use quart-sized bags for faucets and gallon-sized bags for showerheads.) Wrap the bag around the fixture so that anyplace where water exits is completely submerged in the vinegar. Use a rubber band to hold the bag in place, and leave it for an hour or so. Then remove the bag and rinse with water, using a toothbrush to scrub away any lingering residue.

✳ **How often** Once a month.

HUMIDIFIER

✳ **How to clean** Empty all water from the unit. Check the filters and replace any dirty ones. Then clean any mineral deposits with a small brush and whichever disinfectant the manual or company website recommends. (Remember to wear gloves

TIP

Don't forget to wash your dishwasher.



and goggles if you're using a bleach solution.) Afterward, rinse the tank several times to wash away all cleaning chemicals.

✳ **How often** Whenever you notice it looks dirty, and always before you put it away for the season. Let the humidifier dry completely before storing it.

DISHWASHER

✳ **How to clean** Remove the filter, utensil holder, and racks, and wash them separately with soap and warm water to remove any greasy food residue, then replace the parts. Next, clear any debris from the dishwasher drain. (You'll be surprised by how many crumbs get stuck there.) Sprinkle baking soda across the bottom

and set a bowl filled with vinegar on the top rack. Run a cycle on the hottest temperature setting.

✳ **How often** Once a month.

WASHING MACHINE

✳ **How to clean** For a top-loading machine, pour a pound of borax into the drum and add a gallon of vinegar. Then run the washer on the hottest and longest cycle available. For a front loader, pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of vinegar through the detergent compartment, wait 20 minutes, then run the self-cleaning cycle. Afterward, wipe down the inside and leave the door open to let the machine air-dry.

✳ **How often** Once or twice a year, or any time you notice mold or a foul odor.



TIP
*Anything cloth
should wind up
in the laundry.*

RANGE HOOD

✦ **How to clean** Wipe the outside and then the underside of the hood with a soapy soft cloth. Next, remove the filter and let it soak in hot, soapy water for about 20 minutes. Let it dry completely before putting it back. (The same trick also works wonders on stove burner grates.)

✦ **How often** Once a month. Vacuum the hood's exhaust fans once a year.

REFRIGERATOR COILS

✦ **How to clean** Pull the fridge away from the wall and run a handheld vacuum over the coils, exhaust fans, and air vents.

✦ **How often** Once a year.

ELECTRONICS

SCREENS

✦ **How to clean** These surfaces are delicate, so use a microfiber cloth to prevent scratching—and don't apply too much pressure. A dry cloth is all you should need, but to remove stubborn stains, use a mild soap highly diluted with water. Put the solution on the cloth instead of directly on the screen, then wipe. Wiping in circles creates streaks, so use straight strokes, either vertical or horizontal. Don't use glass or window cleaner, as these often contain acetone or ammonia, which can discolor screens.

✦ **How often** Once a week.

KEYBOARD

✦ **How to clean** Turn the keyboard upside down and gently shake it to dislodge any dust and crumbs. Flip it back over and sanitize with a disinfecting wipe. It pays to run one of these wipes over the mouse (and your TV remote) as well.

✦ **How often** Once a week.

EARBUDS

✦ **How to clean** Wipe the plastic part with a dry lint-free cloth and scrub the mesh part with a dry cotton swab. Never use alcohol or disinfecting wipes on the mesh part, but you can wipe it with a slightly damp microfiber cloth if it's really dirty. These tips also work for your cell phone's charging port, although compressed air is your best bet for cleaning that.

✦ **How often** When you see gunk.

SURFACES

CABINET DOORS

✦ **How to clean** Wipe down the faces and knobs with a damp microfiber cloth.

✦ **How often** Once a week.

The interiors need to be wiped down only once a year.

BACKSPLASH

✦ **How to clean** Mix equal parts baking soda and hydrogen peroxide with a splash of degreasing dish soap. This combination breaks down the greasy buildup that is common in

most kitchen areas (but the solution loses its effectiveness if it sits around for too long, so don't make too big a batch). Apply the paste with a microfiber cloth, then rinse it off with a separate damp microfiber cloth.

✦ **How often** Once a month.

LAMP SHADES

✦ **How to clean** Do a quick pass over each lampshade with a handheld vacuum—just not while the light bulb is on. Use the same attachment you would on other upholstered surfaces. (Speaking of this, you'd be surprised by how much schmutz is hiding under your couch cushions, so vacuum there too.)

✦ **How often** Once or twice a year.

CURTAINS

✦ **How to clean** Toss them right into the washing machine, along with other seldom-washed fabric pieces such as oven mitts and reusable grocery bags. As for shower curtains, wash them every few months or so, and simply replace the plastic interior liner when you do.

✦ **How often** Once a year.

WINDOW SCREENS

✦ **How to clean** Remove screens from windows; use an all-purpose cleaner mixed with warm water and apply it with a soft brush to loosen any debris. Then rinse with a hose. This is a job best done outdoors.

✦ **How often** Once a year.

TIP

Sanitize your sponges. Dirty tools don't clean.



FIREPLACE WINDOW

✦ **How to clean** Make sure the glass is cool, then use a commercial cleaner specially formulated for fireplace glass. It may be tempting to use a vacuum to remove the soot buildup, but don't—it could ruin the vacuum.

✦ **How often** Once a year.

GARAGE DOOR TRACKS

✦ **How to clean** Run a cloth along them to ensure that the door can roll up and down smoothly.

✦ **How often** Once a year.

HOME ITEMS

MATTRESS

✦ **How to clean** Sprinkle with baking

soda, let it sit about 20 minutes, then vacuum the entire surface. (Baking soda absorbs moisture and neutralizes odors.) At the same time, throw the duvet cover, mattress pad, and bed skirt into the washing machine.

✦ **How often** Once a month.

TRASH CANS AND RECYCLING BINS

✦ **How to clean** Scrub them—inside and out—with an all-purpose cleaner.

✦ **How often** Once a month.

CLEANING TOOLS

✦ **How to clean** Finish any job by washing your cloths, sanitizing your sponges, and wiping your vacuum and cleaning its filter.

✦ **How often** Anytime you clean. **R**



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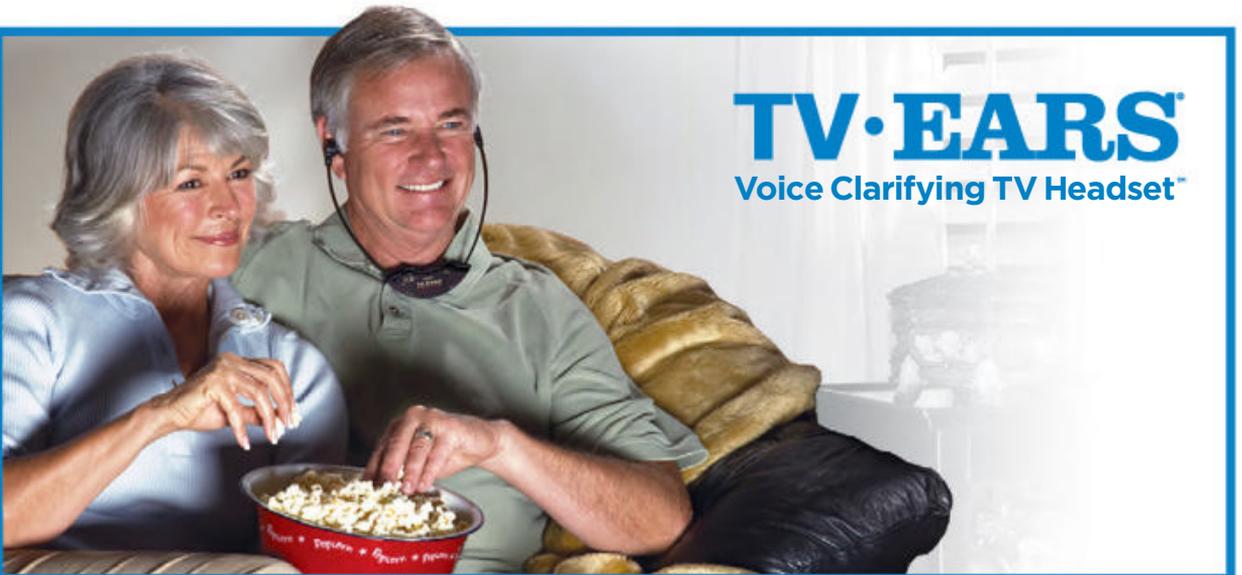
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LIST

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The Offer

From Paramount+

“GANGSTER MOVIES ARE DEAD,” an exec says to *The Godfather* producer Albert S. Ruddy (Miles Teller) while making the landmark gangster film. Dead, *defuncto*, swimming with fishes—*capisce*? In this limited series, Paramount Studios revisits the famously hellish production of its beloved hit: a process of which real-life Ruddy once said “Every day of making *The Godfather* was the

worst day in my life.” Everyone from mobster Joe Colombo to Frank Sinatra, who publicly berated Mario Puzo for writing washed-up warbler Johnny Fontane in his likeness, wanted the film whacked. But, like its inspiration, *The Offer* is a tale of the triumph of American ingenuity. Matthew Goode stars as producer Robert Evans, Dan Fogler as director Francis Ford Coppola, and Juno Temple as Ruddy’s right hand Bettye McCart—his consigliere, eh? (Streaming April 28 on Paramount+.) —Caroline Fanning



Benjamin Franklin

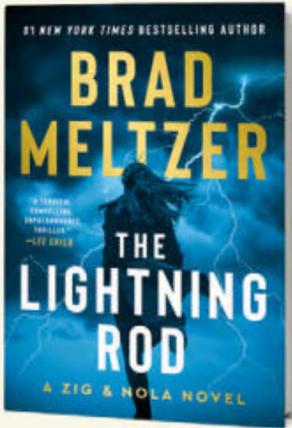
Directed by Ken Burns

How versatile was Benjamin Franklin in his 84 years? Put it this way: His annual publishing of *Poor Richard's Almanac* was maybe his twelfth-most-important accomplishment. The two-part *Benjamin Franklin* explores how an undereducated runaway became a gifted writer, inventor, diplomat, abolitionist, and signer of the Declaration of Independence. But, as biographer Walter Isaacson notes, “We see Franklin not as a perfect person but as somebody evolving to see if he could become more perfect.” Mandy Patinkin supplies Franklin’s voice, and Liam Neeson, Josh Lucas, and Paul Giamatti are also heard. Director Ken Burns’s revelations are nothing short of, well, electrifying. (Airing April 4 and 5 on PBS, and streaming at pbs.org/BenjaminFranklin.) —Mara Reinstein

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BOOKS

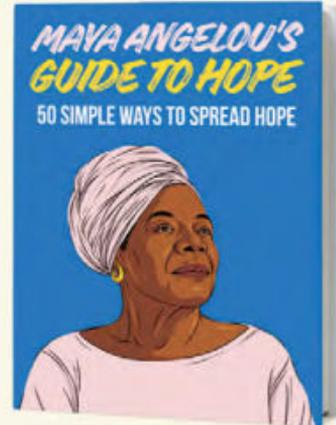
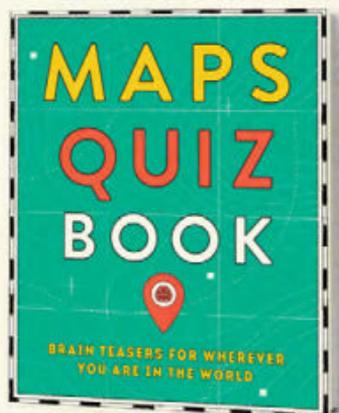


The Lightning Rod By Brad Meltzer

Four years after *The Escape Artist*, a thriller that earned Meltzer some of his best reviews, the veteran suspenser is back with its sequel. *The Lightning Rod* picks up where mortician Jim “Zig” Zigarowski and Sergeant First Class Nola Brown left off (for good, they thought) when Zig finds something he shouldn’t have during a high-priority autopsy. They unravel an unthinkable conspiracy within the U.S. military, grappling with a legion of villains equal parts colorful and deadly. Longtime Meltzer fans will be flabbergasted at an inconceivable Act III, and newcomers will be sucked in without missing a beat. —CF

Maps Quiz Book

Unlike any atlas you’ve seen before, *Maps Quiz Book* makes puzzles out of areas as iconic as Australia’s Sydney Cove and as hyperlocal as New York’s Hudson Valley (bonus if you can plot the longtime *Reader’s Digest* offices). Go from deciphering a pictorial map of Florence, Italy, to the winding Tokyo rail system on the next page. Each map has quizzes of varying difficulty for both young learners and master cartographers. Puzzlers will be tasked with challenges as straightforward as identifying Ecuador’s capital city (easy) or as complicated as charting a silk trading route across a 17th-century map of the East Indies (difficult). —CF



Maya Angelou's Guide to Hope

A love letter to one of America’s greatest writers, *Maya Angelou’s Guide to Hope* delivers pages of the encouraging forehead kisses and procrastination-killing nudges that served as thematic through lines in her work. The illustrated guide entwines 50 acts to help spread hope (Number 30: Draw power from friends, family, and ancestors) with complementary Angelou quotes (her advice to job interviewees: “Take everybody with you all the time who has ever loved you” for backup and confidence). Her legacy is palpable; you needn’t be an *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* scholar to feel it. —Adrienne Farr



The Adventure Podcast

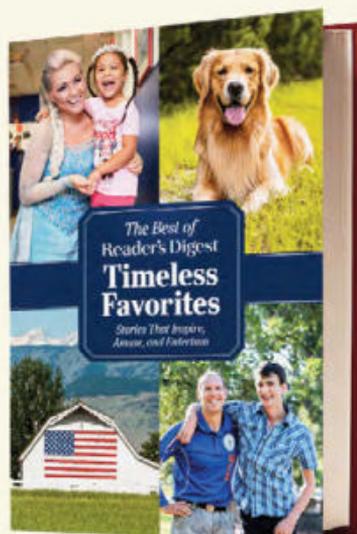
From Terra Incognita

Let filmmaker **Matt Pycroft** introduce you to Aldo Kane, a Royal Marine turned safety specialist who looks after film crews in the world's most hostile environments, as he adapts to the backdrop of fatherhood. Or Gail Muller, whose illness renders most wheelchair-bound, as she shares her Appalachian Trail thru-hike. The Adventure Podcast puts you up close with those who live extraordinary lives and consider themselves explorers of, yes, places such as the Congo and Antarctica, but also the human condition.

(Listen on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Stitcher.) —*CF*



SPECIAL OFFER



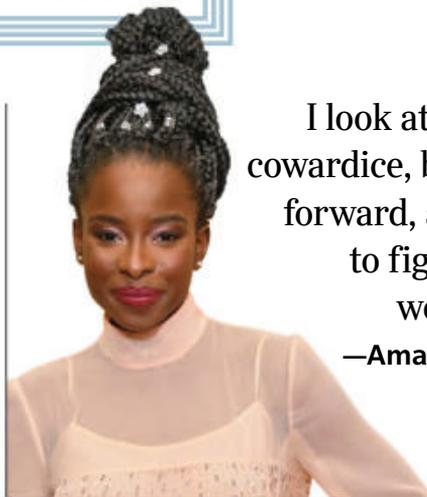
The Best of Reader's Digest Timeless Favorites

Certain tales stick in our memories and remain timeless as the years march on: a man's chance meeting with Einstein at a chamber music performance, the harrowing account of a courageous skydiving instructor determined to save an unconscious diver, and a woman's first-person tale of lucidity during brain surgery. For a limited time, this anthology from *Reader's Digest* editors is just \$10—and shipping is on us. To order, visit rd.com/RDMAY.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

I didn't want to be something cool. I didn't want to be calm. I wanted to be a player that made you say, "Did you see that?"

—Kevin Garnett, BASKETBALL PLAYER, IN THE *New York Times Magazine*



I look at fear not as cowardice, but as a call forward, a summons to fight for what we hold dear.

—Amanda Gorman, POET, IN THE *New York Times*

Blind faith is not true faith. Asking questions and constantly dissecting faith—and still having faith? That represents a truer faith.

—Tim McGraw, SINGER, IN *Esquire*



The real key to happiness? Step one: Marry your best friend. Step two: Always, I mean always, have a plethora of wigs in your home.

—Melissa McCarthy, ACTOR, ON INSTAGRAM



You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, WRITER, IN *The Dispossessed*

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Brain
GAMES
SHARPEN YOUR MIND

Fact or Fiction?

MEDIUM Determine whether each statement is fact or fiction. To reveal the solution to the bonus question at the bottom, write the letters indicated by your responses in the corresponding numbered blanks. Turn the page upside down for the answers.

1. Most people say blue is their favorite color.

FACT: **R** FICTION: **Y**

2. Harvard has had the most commencement speeches given by U.S. presidents.

FACT: **E** FICTION: **I**

3. Orchids don't need soil to grow.



FACT: **V** FICTION: **L**

4. The Volga River runs through West Africa.



FACT: **L** FICTION: **E**

5. The actors who voiced Mickey and Minnie Mouse were married in real life.

FACT: **R** FICTION: **O**

6. The distress call "Mayday" comes from the Battle of Midway during World War II.

FACT: **W** FICTION: **C**

7. Jockeys can be no taller than five foot six.



FACT: **S** FICTION: **A**

8. *Harry Potter* author J. K. Rowling is richer than the queen of England.

FACT: **T** FICTION: **O**

9. Japan has the most vending machines per capita.



FACT: **S** FICTION: **X**

BONUS QUESTION Which Sacramento-based Minor League Baseball team is affiliated with the San Francisco Giants? (Need help? Turn to "A Major Leaguer's Second Chance at Life" on page 68.)

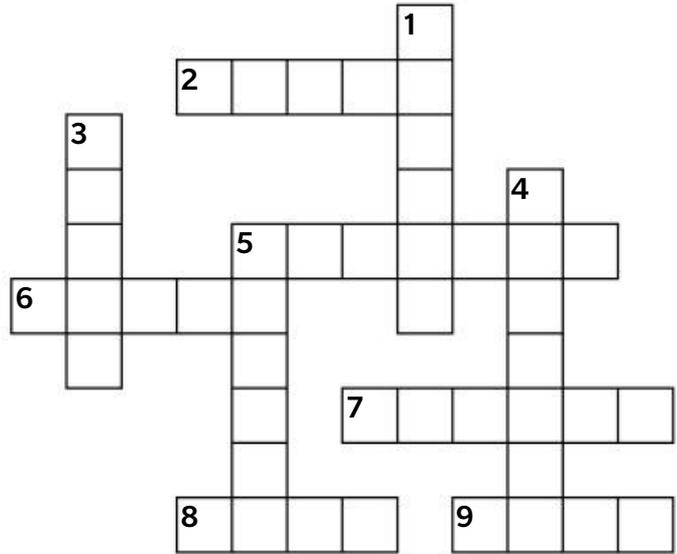
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Answers: 1. Fact. 2. Fiction; the Naval Academy has, or Notre Dame among nonmilitary schools. 3. Fact; they get nutrients from the air. 4. Fiction; the Volga River is in Russia—it's the Volga River in Africa. 5. Fact. 6. Fiction; it comes from the French *m'aider*, or "help me." 7. Fiction; there is no official height limit. 8. Fact. 9. Fact. **Bonus Question:** River Cats.

Quick Crossword

EASY In honor of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, place the names of these Pacific islands into the grid—then go find them on a map:

- FIJI HAWAII
- GUAM EASTER
- TONGA TAHITI
- PALAU VANUATU
- SAMOA TOKELAU



Spymaster

DIFFICULT Deduce a secret number made up of four unique digits from 1 through 9. The chart shows four guesses at the number along with a score for each guess, represented by marbles. Any digit that appears in the secret number in the same position as in the guess is scored with a yellow marble. Any digit that appears in the secret number in a different position than in the guess is scored with a green marble. Any digit that does not appear in the secret number does not get a marble. What's the secret number?

5	1	7	8			
1	3	9	6			
9	1	6	4			
6	8	2	5			

For more Brain Games, go to RD.COM/BRAINGAMES.

For answers, turn to **PAGE 115**.



This month's quiz will whisk you off to a kingdom far, far away, full of fair maidens, dashing princes, and mythical monsters. Your quest: Choose the correct definitions for these words, all inspired by fairy tales and fables. Once you slay that dragon, turn to the next page for your happily ever after.

BY Sarah Chassé

1. valiant *adj.*

('val-yent)

- A royal
- B courageous
- C gentle

2. crone *n.*

(krohn)

- A cruel old woman
- B enchanted frog
- C long-lost twin

3. motif *n.*

(moh-'teef)

- A series of riddles
- B hooded cloak
- C recurring theme

4. joust *v.*

(joust)

- A overthrow a king
- B curse for 100 years
- C battle on horseback

5. talisman *n.*

('tal-us-man)

- A suit of armor
- B lucky object
- C bad omen

6. chalice *n.*

('chal-iss)

- A drinking vessel
- B lost child
- C troll's weapon

7. damsel *n.*

('dam-zel)

- A young woman
- B magic bean
- C golden goose

8. betrothed *adj.*

(bih-'trohthd)

- A wealthy
- B covered in jewels
- C engaged

9. kelpie *n.*

('kel-pee)

- A witch
- B water spirit
- C stepsister

10. pastoral *adj.*

('past-uh-rel)

- A rural
- B ancient
- C passed down

11. knave *n.*

(nayv)

- A deceitful man
- B traveling musician
- C eldest son

12. parable *n.*

('payr-uh-bull)

- A tall tower
- B shepherd's staff
- C story with a moral

13. soothsayer *n.*

('sooth-say-er)

- A matchmaker
- B singer of ballads
- C psychic

14. coronate *v.*

('kor-uh-nayt)

- A banish
- B crown
- C wake with a kiss

15. ogre *n.*

('oh-ger)

- A impossible task
- B drawbridge
- C man-eating giant



Once upon a Time, Around the World

“Once upon a time ...” These words signal to readers of all ages to settle in—it’s story time. In English, versions of the phrase can be found as early as 1380. Other languages have their own intros. In West Africa, a tale might begin: “A story, a story. Let it go, let it come.” In Arabic, the formula goes: “There was or there was not ...” And in Chile, you get this reminder: “Listen to tell it, and tell it to teach it.”

Word Power ANSWERS

1. valiant (B) *courageous*
Thanks to the valiant efforts of firefighters, no one was injured in the blaze.

2. crone
(A) *cruel old woman*
Mrs. Claxton is known as the neighborhood crone, but she’s always been kind to me.

3. motif
(C) *recurring theme*
The battle between good and evil is a common motif in literature from many cultures.

4. joust
(C) *battle on horseback*
Sir Percival and his rival, Sir William, will joust tomorrow at noon.

5. talisman
(B) *lucky object*
Giuseppe carries a

rabbit’s foot as a talisman when he visits the casino.

6. chalice
(A) *drinking vessel*
The wicked queen offered her enemy a chalice full of poison.

7. damsel
(A) *young woman*
I’m no damsel in distress, you know—I have a black belt in karate!

8. betrothed (C) *engaged*
The princess is betrothed to a handsome duke and will be a blushing bride.

9. kelpie (B) *water spirit*
According to Scottish legend, kelpies lure unsuspecting travelers to drown in lakes and rivers.

10. pastoral (A) *rural*
Hans prefers his quiet, pastoral life over the hustle and bustle of cities.

11. knave
(A) *deceitful man*

“That knave Rodrigo has betrayed me!” Jack cried.

12. parable
(C) *story with a moral*
The parable of King Midas reminds us to be careful what we wish for.

13. soothsayer
(C) *psychic*
After examining the tea leaves, the soothsayer predicted a rich harvest.

14. coronate (B) *crown*
Leonora was coronated as queen immediately after her uncle died.

15. ogre
(C) *man-eating giant*
Perhaps the most famous ogre on film, Shrek is more friendly than fearsome.

Vocabulary Ratings

9 & BELOW: squire
10–12: knight
13–15: emperor

ANSWERS

WHERE, OH WHERE?

(page 44)

A. Dufur, Oregon.

Dufur is located less than 20 miles south of the city of The Dalles, which was the town at the end of the famous Oregon Trail.

BRAIN GAMES

(page 112)

Quick Crossword

ACROSS

2. TONGA
5. TOKELAU
6. SAMOA
7. HAWAII
8. FIJI
9. GUAM

DOWN

1. EASTER
3. PALAU
4. VANUATU
5. TAHITI

Spymaster

1385

PHOTO FINISH



Winner

“Here’s the open-floor concept you wanted.”
—ARLENE NISKAR *Farmington Hills, Michigan*

Runners-Up

“Narnia!”

—KIP LOUISE McVAY *Gainesville, Georgia*

“Strange; this is all bathroom and no house.”

—CHARLES CARNEY *Knoxville, Tennessee*

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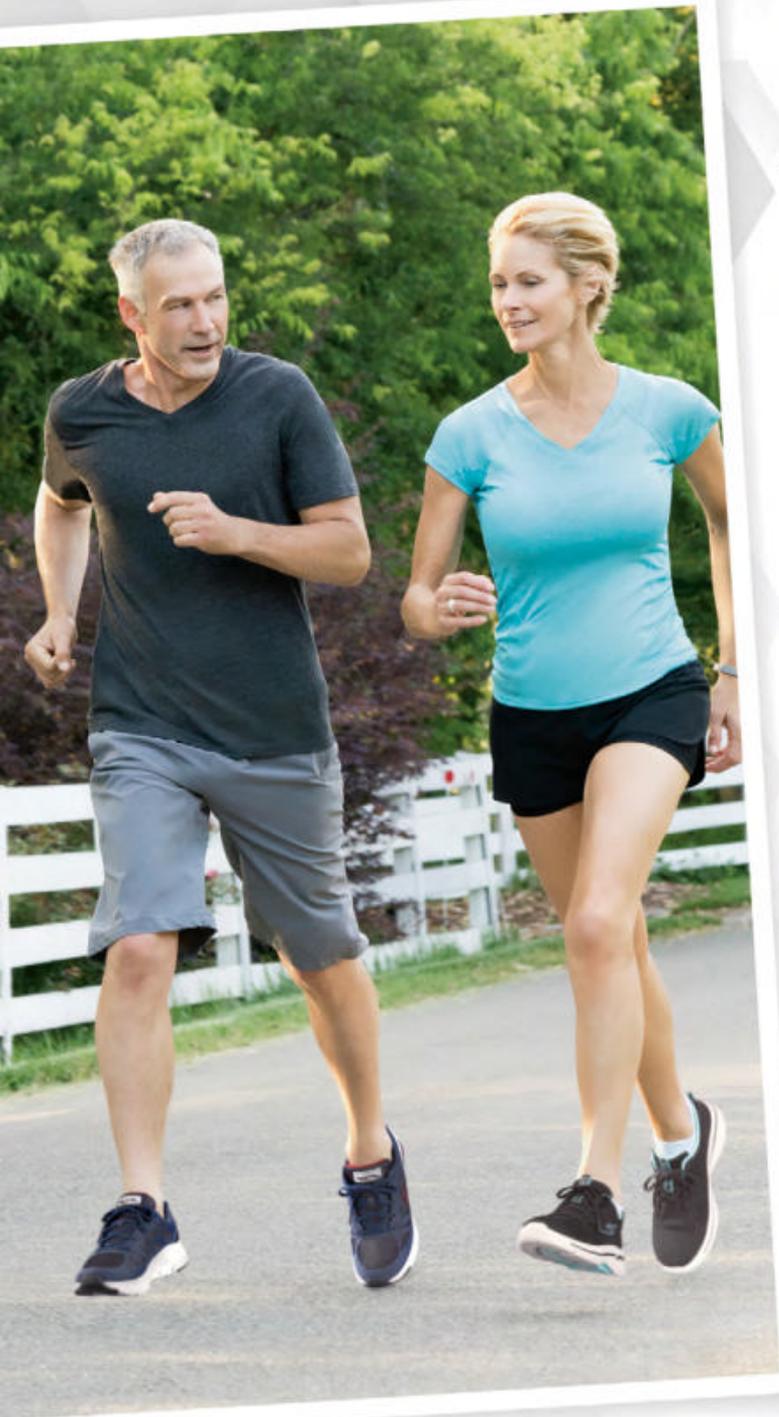
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